

MAFIA WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY ITALY
The Changing Role of Women in the Italian Mafia since 1945

Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctoral Philosophy

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2005



ABSTRACT

By relying mainly on court cases and interviews with *pentiti* (people who turned state's evidence), this thesis shows that the role of women in the Italian mafia has significantly changed since 1945. Beyond performing their traditional role, including transmitting mafia values, encouraging vendetta, guaranteeing men's honour and participating in arranged marriages, women started to be involved in criminal activities.

Through an historical approach, this thesis demonstrates that changes in the mafia in terms of businesses and structure, and changes in Italian women's conditions have been contributory factors to the above process. This thesis identifies those historical conjunctures where the supply and demand of female labour met within the last thirty years.

Since the 1970s, the expansion of drug trafficking and the subsequent accumulation of vast sums of money to be recycled led the mafia to employ women who were also trustworthy and above suspicion. The mafia's need to involve women occurred also in the early 1980s and in the early-mid 1990s when the state improved its battle against the mafia. As many mafia bosses were imprisoned or went underground women assumed temporary leadership positions. The mafia's need for workers was concomitant with the changes in women's conditions in the legal world, resulting in the gradual dissolution of gender barriers and the growth of female education, which made women more likely to be employed by organised crime.

This thesis argues that the new female participation in the mafia was not the result of a concession of equality within the mafia labour market. General indicators, such as the persistence of patriarchal relations and women's economic dependence, temporary allocation of power to women during periods of emergency, use of female labour in low profile jobs, and exclusion of women from career opportunities, suggest that the increasing public presence of women in the mafia, beyond mere supportive and private roles, was the result of a process of female 'pseudo-emancipation'. On the contrary, women who turned state's evidence were examples of female liberation since they chose to reject the male dominated mafia system.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work would have not been possible without the support of many people and institutions. Among the latter I would like to thank the University of Milan which offered me a two-year scholarship to study abroad, the Department of History at Queen Mary that waived tuition fees for the last two part-time years, the Central Research Fund which provided me with a field research grant, and finally Kingston University for the Jean Monnet Grant. Moreover, I wish to thank the University of Palermo and in particular professor Giovanni Fiandaca, who gave me the stimulating chance to join a prestigious multidisciplinary study group on the role of women within international organised crime. Working with Professor Fiandaca has been a precious opportunity.

For the permission to interview *pentiti* I wish to thank the *Commissione Centrale ex.art.10* and in particular *maggiore* Gianni Saraceno. I would also like to express my appreciation to all the people working in the *Servizio Centrale di protezione*, who were really efficient in arranging meetings with *pentiti*.

Many people helped me to beautify my written English since the beginning of the PhD: many thanks to Brent Evans, Alice Lawrence, Liselle Terriet, Pauline Terriet, Joice Terriet, Alex Colletta, Emily Slater and Dan Stern. Special thanks go to Stephen Jackson who read the final draft of this thesis with passion and enthusiasm.

I am grateful to all those mafia experts who shared their perspectives with me. These included magistrates, lawyers, politicians, journalists, policemen, social workers, priests, and also common people I met during my stay in Southern Italy. Thanks to Marco Alma, Ferdinando Asaro, Pippo Cipriani, Enrico Consolandi, Padre Garau, Nicola Gratteri, Giovanni from Palermo, Guido Marino, Michele Prestipino, Annamaria Picozzi, Massimo Russo, Flavia Panzano, Rita from Africo, Beppe Russo and Laura Vaccaro.

I would like to give my special thanks to Enzo Ciconte and lawyer Federico Stellari for their advice and assistance. Rita Vecchio working in the Milan court showed to be not only an efficient woman, but above all a really good friend. Her advice before meeting some *pentiti* was priceless.

Interviews with *ex-mafiosi* were the central oral sources of this work. Rita Di Giovine, Vittorio Foschini and Vincenzo La Piana demonstrated their generosity by recounting their life stories. For this reason I will be forever grateful to them. In particular, I would like to thank Rita whose brave character had an important emotional impact on myself.

Don Luigi Ciotti, Nando dalla Chiesa, Monica Massari, Giovanna Fiume, Jole Garuti, Anna Puglisi and Umberto Santino have constantly been an important point of reference to me in order to continue studying the mafia with the aim of contributing to its defeat. Simona Mafai is always an exemplary model to me for her political commitment and her deep understanding of the woman's question. I also thank her for being a sincere friend.

I wish to thank Maria Quine for her encouragement and for offering her female point of view on my hypothesis. I thank Professor Adolfo Ceretti who has constantly provided me with friendly and kind support.

Renate Siebert's work has been an inspiring source since my initial interest in mafia women. Meeting her was an important stimulus to transform my *laurea* thesis into a doctoral research program. Working with John Dickie was an important and fruitful experience. He gave me the rare opportunity to discuss mafia issues in London.

I wish to express my deep gratitude to public prosecutor Maurizio Romanelli with whom I had numerous intense and illuminating conversations. I want to thank him also for his friendship.

Without a solid web of friends I would have run the risk to abandon my program. Therefore, my debt towards my friends in Milan, Lipari, Palermo and London is invaluable.

I wish to thank all those Milanese friends who, despite my moving to London, showed me their constant friendship. Special thanks go to Cristina Legnani who showed to be more than a friend and to Giovanni Marsili who has always believed in my work. Thanks to Paolo Borghi for interesting discussions, which helped to fill in my lack of knowledge about anthropology, and for helping me with the layout of the thesis.

My Palermo families not only offered me great accommodation, but above all love and affection. There is no way to thank Flavia, Valeria, Mimmo, Manfredino, Marina, Margherita, Giuliana and Pietro. I would also like to thank my friends Vanessa and Valentina for making me feel at home in Palermo. Many thanks also to Raffaella Catalano and Giacomo Cacciatore who helped me to understand the contradicting features of Palermo. Discussions with them were always fascinating.

In London 'the little Italy' made my living in London easy, stimulating and enjoyable. For this reason I want to thank Marta Foresti, Silvia Longo, Brent Evans, Paolo Nelli, Sauro Scarpelli, Massimo Mariani, Enrico Benco and Marcella Favretto. For the funny moments in London I also want to thank my Phd fellows Claudia Baldoli, Pietro Di Paola, Marta

Bonsanti and Pieter Francois. Thanks to Jon Davis for his companionship and for teaching me parts of the British culture, including drinking beer and playing pool. Many thanks to Caterina Gaia who shared with me the funny and nostalgic moments of my first year in London, and also to Lorenzo Viola. Liselle Terriet and Roberto Verdugo were unforgettable flatmates who had the patience to put up with my moody character. I thank them for the hilarious and intense time we had together. Liselle supported me with the same love as if she was a sister. I want to thank Roddy Brett who made me understand that English is a fascinating language. During two of the most critical moments of my PhD, namely at the very beginning and at the end, Ilaria Favretto offered me great help. She gave me invaluable support by providing me with hospitality and friendship. I am greatly indebted to Filippo De Vivo for his hospitality and for our infinite laughing. Ilaria and Filippo are also important role models of serious and reliable scholars.

I will never forget the great moments hanging around London with my friend Giacomo Cavadini. Our funny and intense chats walking along South Bank were one of the most solid psychological supports during my doctoral research.

Nicknamed 'my second supervisor', Stefania Bernini was an irreplaceable fellow of my academic adventure, of my political involvement and of my ironic view on life. She proved to be very patient with me by paying attention to my 'crazy' theoretical hypotheses. Her interesting and critical insight helped me to resolve many conceptual problems of this work. I will never forget our 'theoretical chatting' while walking from the British Library to the Historical Research Institute or visiting Judd Books.

There is no way of acknowledging my debts to journalist and friend Salvo Palazzolo, who more than generously offered me his deep knowledge about the mafia and transmitted to me his love for Palermo. He also provided me with unedited sources thus making this work possible. Unlike most mafia experts, Salvo has the gift of knowing without showing off his knowledge.

I had the rare fortune to be supervised by a great master such as Professor Donald Sassoon, to whom I wish to show my immense gratitude for his brilliant advice, unbiased approach and human comprehension. He taught me that the relationship between master and student is an equal one and not hierarchical. Not less important, his good sense of humour made the tutorial meetings highly enjoyable.

I wish to express my deep gratitude to Professor Giulio Sapelli who pushed me to undertake this path. I thank him especially for teaching me that good research involves not

only rationality but also emotion. He is a rare example of a rigorous and passionate scholar. His constant paternal encouragement helped me to overcome the most difficult moments. I will never forget our conversations sharing theoretical doubts and solutions, enjoying the feeling of interweaving our thoughts. My immense esteem and friendship will never be capable of compensating the debt I owe to him.

Anna and Sergio Vecchioni with their discretion, love and passion for education have always shown interest and appreciation for my work. Their loving and parental support gave me a fundamental feeling of security.

Beyond description is the gratitude to my family who gave me profound emotional support and financial assistance. I thank my parents for bringing me up according to the values of social justice. My father Gianni with his great sense of humour was always able to defuse my 'critical' situations. Importantly, he transmitted to me the curiosity for the mafia and for politics. My mother Graziella with her strong and positive character has constantly offered me her smile and assurance during the most difficult times. The special and unique relationship with my sister Marina, consisting of funny, hilarious and intellectual chatting, is the fulcrum of the sustaining web mentioned so far. Her unconditional trust in me gave me the right strength to acquire the necessary self-confidence to carry out this work. I owe her an enormous debt for her indefatigable capacity to listen to me with sincerity and to always give me the correct advice at the right moment.

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INTRODUCTION

According to criminal statistics the number of women reported and charged with mafia association in Italy over the past thirty years has slightly increased.¹ However, qualitative evidence shows that the role of women within the mafia system has significantly changed.

Until the early 1990s both academic and popular assumptions held that women were unaware of their men's illegal activities and played only a passive role. The new wave of mafia studies revisited such a view thus taking part in the 'revolution' concerning the study of Southern Italy. The new paradigm went beyond the reductive image of backwardness. A similar change in perspective involved the history of women in the South.² As historian Giovanna Fiume puts it: 'Within the southern question lurks a female question as an internal complication, characterized by the same generalizations and stereotypes.'³

In analysing the changing role of women in the mafia this thesis, in line with the new scholarship, challenges some of those stereotypes that have labelled the history of Southern women to date. Furthermore, when analysing 'male patronage', this thesis expresses the need to seek those 'constellations of unequal relations that tie together men and women by investigating exchange, interdependence, reciprocal conditioning (...) rather than the unrealistic and simplistic opposition between domination and oppression'.⁴ At the same time, this thesis points out that recognising the numerous ways whereby women have been able to negotiate their power under male domination must not neglect those elements of subordination still prevailing in the condition of mafia women.

Moreover, while acknowledging the great contribution of revisionist studies in reconstructing the history of criminal organisations, this thesis analyses the mafia within the traditional theoretical model that paid attention more to the cultural aspects of the mafia system than to the criminal ones. Such an approach becomes necessary when dealing with mafia women, since typical roles played by women in the mafia, though not criminally liable (i.e. transmitting mafia values), were crucial to the survival of the criminal organisation. At this point let me clarify that stressing the cultural dimension of the mafia

¹For criminal statistics see statistical appendix to chapter six.

²See Amalia Signorelli, 'Il pragmatismo delle donne. La condizione femminile nella trasformazione delle campagne', in Simonetta Piccone Stella (a cura di), *Genere. La costruzione sociale del femminile e del maschile*, il Mulino, Bologna, 1996.

³Giovanna Fiume, 'Making Women Visible in the History of the Mezzogiorno', in Enrico Dal Lago and Rick Halpern (eds.), *The American South and the Italian Mezzogiorno*, Palgrave, London, 2002, p. 173.

⁴*ibid.*, p.178.

does not mean reducing it to a cultural phenomenon. This thesis, in fact, considers the various Italian mafias as criminal organisations following those interpretations that emerged in light of confessions of *pentiti*. However, it also stresses the necessity to combine the two views by assuming a third way of understanding thereby overcoming the dualistic picture portrayed of mafia women. While in the past they were considered wholly subjugated to their men, there has been a recent tendency to ascribe a strong, albeit invisible power to them. This thesis, instead, suggests that female criminal involvement should be seen in a balanced perspective. As shown in chapter six, the study of mafia women needs to be approached by adopting a broad conception which merges the two lines of interpretation.

In addition, the investigation of such ambiguous and vast territory required qualitative rather than quantitative data. Statistics about women reported and charged with mafia association were insufficient to grasp such a complex reality. Chapter six will show that official data are misleading in relation to women's criminality because of the high 'dark number'.⁵ That is why this thesis deals only marginally with quantitative data, while it concentrates on life stories, capable of offering us a useful internal insight.

Description of the thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to describe and explain how and to what extent the role of women in the mafia has changed since 1945. Such a considerable span of time enables us to trace the trajectory of change, given the fact that both Italian society and the mafia have undergone a great transformation over the last fifty years.

The first three chapters are meant to give the reader a preliminary criminological and historical framework for the core of the research presented in chapters four to seven.

Chapter one offers the reader an overview of criminological theories on female crimes since the turn of the 19th century. While epistemological clues in early gender-biased studies on female offenders help us to reveal that traditional analyses of mafia women were reductive and gender limited, sociological theories by shifting the attention from a biological explanation of crime to an environmental one provides us with useful heuristic tools to analyse mafia women. As the thesis unfolds, it will be clear that notions derived

⁵For a clear and simple explanation of the notion of *numero oscura* (dark number), Gianluigi Ponti, *Compendio di Criminologia*, Cortina, Milano, 1993, pp. 65-69; Mike Maguire, Rod Morgan, Robert Reiner (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994, p.161.

from sociological theories -anomie, differential learning, social control, labelling, conformity- are useful in reading some tasks performed by women in the mafia. At the same time sociological theories of criminality present some drawbacks as far as they look at female offenders as opposite to male delinquents. Feminist scholarship, instead, furnishes us with a fruitful switch of perspective by asking 'different questions' and explaining female crime through specific gender theories.⁶ These, including patriarchy, marginalisation, social control and emancipation theories, will be essential to the study of mafia women.

Chapter two traces the history of Italian women since the Second World War in terms of the labour market and social customs. Given the focus of this research, the need for such a reconstruction is self-evident. However, it should be emphasised that examining the profound transformation witnessed by three generations of Italian women helped not only to draw a parallel between the lawful world and that of the mafia in terms of the use of female labour force, but also to reveal that the changes in women's social status had an impact on the transformation of women's positions inside the mafia.

The latter transformation was also influenced by the evolution of the mafia in terms of structure, mentality, and illegal business. All these elements are examined in chapter three devoted to a brief history of the Sicilian mafia. For the sake of brevity, the third chapter focuses on Cosa Nostra, although the thesis also concerns the 'Ndrangheta. This lack is not serious since the two organisations evolved generally in similar ways, moving from an agrarian to an urban phase, and assuming increasingly financial traits. However, it is fundamental to bear in mind that Cosa Nostra and the 'Ndrangheta function according to different structures, respectively pyramidal and horizontal. More centralised compared to the 'Ndrangheta, Cosa Nostra presents a basic criminal group which is made up mostly by members united by affiliation, unlike the core of the 'Ndrangheta which is composed of members related by blood ties. Throughout the work there will be an emphasis on indicating differences between the two organisations.

The heart of the thesis starts with an anthropological chapter investigating the traditional role of women in the mafia, which involved universal concepts such as of mothering, and folklore customs such as of honour and vendetta. The traditional role is analysed according to four functions: two of them active -transmitting mafia values and

⁶ Frances Heidensohn, 'Gender and Crime', in Maguire, Morgan, Reiner (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook*, pp.791.

encouraging vendetta -, and two passive -influencing men's attribution of honour and participating in mafia prescribed marriages. Particular attention is drawn to the debate on the code of honour, including the direct correlation between female sexual behaviour and men's honour. This female function is considered passive because women are compelled to employ 'correct' behaviour in order to guarantee men's reputation.

Chapter five, entitled 'The Lady Boss', gives the reader numerous examples of the 'new' female involvement in mafia activities. Traditionally, women supported mafia members by being messengers or helping men hide from rival clans or from the police. What marked the turning point for women in the mafia labour market was the increase in mafia participation in the drug trade in the 1970s. The drug business changed the organisation in many respects; the most striking one was the use of women. Such female employment is analysed in detail by considering all the levels of the drug trafficking chain, from transport to managing the trade. The second section of chapter five deals with women employed by the mafia in financial activities; while the last part investigates women who become bosses on behalf of their men, including husbands, fathers and brothers. Here, the thesis dwells upon the temporary and delegated nature of female power in the mafia.

By using anthropological and historical evidence, chapters four and five trace the development of women in the mafia from their traditional roles to temporary leadership positions. Chapter six explores the change in the widespread image of mafia women and the consequences of this transformation at the judiciary level. The attitude of the criminal justice system shifted from considering mafia women as mere wives of mafiosi chargeable only with *favoreggiamento* (aiding and abetting) to investigating their involvement in greater depth. Leaving behind stereotypes led criminal investigators, on discovering substantial evidence, to accuse and sentence some women with mafia association.

Finally, the last chapter concludes the examination of mafia women by exploring *pentitismo* (the act of turning state's evidence) from a gender perspective. Firstly, attention is given to the attitudes of women relatives of *pentiti*, ranging from solidarity to hostility towards their men's decision to collaborate with justice. Secondly, the chapter looks in great detail at women who turn state's witness and concentrates on the story of Rita Di Giovine, a *pentita* I interviewed in 1998. This section focuses on the category of personal 'choice' not only as an individual to change one's own mafia mentality but also as an exemplary turning point with a potentially more general impact, helping to modify the cultural structure that gives rise to mafia organisations.

Method and sources

Not only is an interdisciplinary approach necessary in women's studies, but it is also one of the main features of feminist scholarship.¹ In this sense, this work could be defined as 'feminist' to the extent that it owes a debt to diverse social sciences, including history, criminology, sociology, and anthropology. All contributed to clarifying the picture of the fluid and contradictory realm of mafia women. However, the main approach of this thesis is historical, since it aims at identifying change and continuity in women's status over time within the mafia system. So far mafia women have been studied mainly from sociological and psychological perspectives, more at a symbolic and representative level than a historical one. The latter perspective enables us to identify both progressive and resisting forces, and to unmask those elements which seem to belong to modern times yet still are an expression of traditional behaviour patterns. Thus the case of mafia women becomes useful in understanding how an apparently traditional phenomenon such as the mafia has been able to acclimatize itself within the modernisation process.

This thesis is based on my previous project on mafia women carried out in 1999 for my *laurea* thesis. At that time, my theoretical aim was to see whether or not the change in women's roles in the mafia indicated a process of female emancipation. My findings suggested that mafia women's passage from marginality to leadership positions could be defined as a process of 'pseudo-emancipation'. During the years of my doctoral research, although it became clear that the notion of female emancipation was a theoretical trap that would limit the understanding of the subjective nuances of women's experience, the model of interpretation constructed in my *laurea* thesis proved capable of understanding the long-term historical process. In other words, further evidence confirmed general indicators existed -the persistence of patriarchal relations and women's economic dependence, temporary allocation of power to women during periods of emergency, use of female labour in low profile jobs, and exclusion of women from career opportunities- which suggested that the increasing public presence of women in the mafia, beyond mere supportive and private roles, was the result of a process of female 'pseudo-emancipation'. At the same time it emerges that the above definition could not be extended to a single subject whose relation to female emancipation was personal and might not be either grasped or understood by social scientists. This is to say that the 'pseudo-emancipation'

¹Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires, *Feminism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997, p. 115.

model was valid at the macro level, yet it failed to wholly explain the micro level. Given the fact there have been many female behavioural patterns in the mafia and many psychological reasons for women to either support or refuse the mafia system, the above model should be integrated with a more fluid theoretical understanding, in order to give greater consideration to the subjectivity of women's experiences in the mafia.

Such understanding is achievable through a qualitative approach and through oral sources. These, indeed, were the main evidence in reconstructing the history of mafia women presented in the following pages. The principal informants were *pentiti* (people who turned state's evidence), who offered me unique and valuable insight into the issue. I obtained the permission from the *Commissione Centrale ex.art.10* to interview not only Rita Di Giovine, but also two men who used to be members of Cosa Nostra and 'Ndrangheta, and also belonged to different generations.² So this thesis has been provided with a wide perspective. Internal information was combined with that contributed by experts on the topic, including public prosecutors, politicians, journalists, lawyers, priests and social workers. In addition, a great deal of trial documents and newspaper information completed the picture. It should be pointed out that judiciary material (indictments, acts and rulings) also included tapes of intercepted conversations and of electronic surveillance carried out within the prison system.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the general validity of the use of oral sources; here it is sufficient to make few observations on how oral sources were treated in this thesis.³ My method of preparing, conducting and analysing interviews draws inspiration both from anthropologists and historians. On the one hand, my intention was to investigate the cultural construction expressed by the words of the interviewees, on the other hand, to have information on events, facts and protagonists which enabled me to reconstruct an historical process, namely the changing role of women in the mafia. That is why I tried to assume the proper method of oral historians who 'go into the interview armed with documents, (...), citations from other sources, and other memory aids'.⁴ The effort was to separate the informer's tale from the myth stemming from her/his social identity, which in the case of mafia people is particularly accentuated given the powerful

² For the establishing of the *Commissione centrale*, its function and the *pentiti* law see chapter seven of this thesis.

³ For a clear and convincing defence of oral evidence see Ronald J. Grele, *Envelopes of Sound. The Art of Oral History*, Praeger, New York, 1999, pp.243-272.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 250.

and all-encompassing ideology of the mafia. In similar cases it is necessary to address the informer with 'transversal' questions in order to break through both the prefixed memory of the mafia past, and the 'judiciary memory' that he/she has developed while he/she is questioned scores of times by judges and lawyers. Therefore the historian-interviewer needs to surprise informers by addressing them with questions on topics they have never considered. For example, in the interviews for this work, informers were quite spontaneous in their answers, because my questions on the role of women in the mafia concerned an unusual topic. However, at the same time, they concerned the private sphere and, hence, informers tended to be a bit reticent. In that case developing a trusting relationship was crucial.

Generally speaking, in oral evidence the presentation of the past is influenced by the present. The weight of the present on re-telling the past was particularly marked in the case of *pentiti*'s tales, because their present clashed with their criminal past. The decision to collaborate with justice brought about a change (whether formal or informal) in identity. Such a new viewpoint sometimes influenced their self-perception and self-presentation. This emerges clearly in Rita's account reported in chapter seven.

When interviewing *pentiti*, the relation between interviewer and interviewee, a field of inquiry amply investigated by oral historians, assumed peculiar features.⁵ *Pentiti* were ex-criminals, including murderesses, who talked about their criminal activities. Such special experience widened the gap with the researcher, whose reality was far away from criminality. Facing someone who told me about his routine job of killing, without showing any sense of guilt, was not only a remarkable experience for me, but it also raised an ethical dilemma. In such cases, the researcher inevitably makes a moral condemnation of the action from the past of his/her informer. However, this need not impinge upon the most important attitude of a researcher who gathers first hand testimonies, that is showing an authentic and unbiased interest in listening to the informer's words.

Any interview is a communicative act. And this observation becomes particularly meaningful when analysing interviews with ex-mafiosi. In fact, the interpretation of the interview must consider not only what they say, but also gestures and their way of speaking and gestures. Although the interviewee might draw them from media representations and thus mirror the caricature of mafiosi, it is still relevant to take notes on

⁵Alessandro Portelli, 'Oral History as Genre', in Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson (eds.), *Narrative and Genre*, Routledge, London, 1998, p.30.

them. Importantly, observing these aspects has nothing to do with the intention of giving mafiosi a mythical image that might contribute to accentuating the already stereotypical picture of them. However, from what my experience suggested, not only understanding mafia nuances in their body language and facial expression, but also having good knowledge of the mafia structure and mentality, are central to conducting a successful interview with an ex-mafioso. These aspects are crucial not only in order to avoid interrupting the flow of the account by asking clarifying questions, but also to reduce the gap with the interviewee by showing a high level of 'understanding'.

The theme of oral history brings us to the last point I want to stress in the introduction, namely the political tension which drives this work. On a general level, the social concern of oral history lies on the purpose of giving worth to the lives of every man and woman as part of history. To such aim this thesis adds a dual political purpose, namely bringing further reflection on the women's question and mafia issues. Therefore, the intent of this work is to contribute indirectly to improving women's condition and the battle against the mafia. Progress in the latter could be achieved by a better understanding of the mafia, and this can be reached not only by reading trial sources or through the testimonies of important bosses. It is also necessary to collect the stories of those people who were involved in the mafia at all ranks and levels, including women, and listening to their words. Thereby we will be close to understanding why a modern society might need the mafia system. The hope is that this work might bring a contribution in this direction.

CHAPTER ONE

Theories of Female Crime

Introduction

The low involvement of women in mafia crime and its recent and current increase mirrors the general upward trend of female criminality. However, it is important to bear in mind that 'the new female criminal, much heralded by the media, is more myth than reality. The most puzzling and unexplained social fact remains the comparative absence of criminality among women.'¹ Similarly, the increase in the number of women charged with mafia association must be read with caution to avoid assuming that 'the mafia is female.'² Crime, including mafia association, 'is still a man's world'.³

In this thesis, the issue of mafia women is considered within the wider category of female crime and studied using several criminological theories on female criminal behaviour described in this preliminary chapter. Their application to mafia women will emerge throughout the thesis; here it will be sufficient to trace the development of the study of female criminality from the 19th century to the 1990s, including early, conventional sociological and feminist theories.

Just as all disciplines have historically neglected female issues, criminology overlooked female criminals because of the low crime rate among women. Criminology has begun employing a gender perspective since the early 1970s as part of the general development of women's studies and also because the crime rate among women has increased.

¹ Eileen Leonard, 'Theoretical Criminology and Gender', in Barbara Raffel Price and Natalie J. Sokoloff (eds.), *The Criminal Justice System and Women: Women Offenders, Victims, Workers*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1995 (2d ed.), p. 55.

² See, for example, how Italian newspapers on 13 July 2004 commented the arrests of Antonella Di Graziano and Rosa Fiordilino, who run extortion operations in Castellamare del Golfo (Trapani). In particular see *L'Unità*, 14/07/04.

³ Darrell Steffensmeier and Jennifer Schwartz, 'Trends in Female Criminality: Is Crime Still a Man's World?', in Barbara Raffel Price and Natalie J. Sokoloff (eds.), *The Criminal Justice System and Women: Women Offenders, Victims, Workers*, Clark Boardmann, New York, 2004 (3d ed.), p. 95.

1.1. Early theories

'Early theorists' were those scholars who dealt specifically with female crime in contrast to the mainstream criminology of their time. Despite belonging to different periods, they shared a biological, deterministic approach. Feminists have recently reviewed their work in order to criticise those contemporary scholars still using their assumptions and methods.⁴

Early theorists, including Cesare Lombroso, William Thomas, Otto Pollak and John Cowie will be analysed here by looking at their thought and methodology without mentioning any of the various critiques. It is important to keep in mind the historical context in which their theories were born in order to understand how their views were conditioned by their own period's perspective.

Let's start with Cesare Lombroso, unanimously considered the father of criminology since his thought influenced other authors' methods and beliefs. Cesare Lombroso belonged to the Italian Positivist School, influenced by Darwin's theory of evolution and concerned with the competitive adaptation of species to their environment in order to survive.⁵ At the end of the 19th century, evolution, along with the scientific method, affected the interpretation of reality in various fields such as social sciences, literature and historiography, which lead to a deterministic and naturalistic approach. Determinism stated that events were inevitability caused by specific, given, 'determined' reasons. Naturalism was the name given to the way late 19th century scholars tried to understand reality through mere observation.

In *L'uomo delinquente* (Criminal Man), published in 1876, Lombroso explained criminality by elaborating on Darwin's theory of evolution. Lombroso's theory of 'born criminals' considered criminal behaviour as mostly an *a priori* characteristic of individuals.⁶ He distinguished 'born' and 'occasional' criminals; the first referred to someone born with an inclination toward crime and with specific physical malformations; the second referred to someone who became a criminal after his birth. The specific

⁴Frances Heidensohn, *Women and Crime*, London, MacMillan, 1985, p.43. Carol Smart, *Women, Crime and Criminology: A Feminist Critique*, Routledge, London, 1977. A list of authors using still a biologic approach is in Anne Worrall, *Offending Women: Female Lawbreaking and the Criminal Justice System*, Routledge, London, 1990.

⁵For the historical context of Lombroso's thought, Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989, and also the introduction to the new translation of Cesare Lombroso's *The Female Offender* by Nicole Hahn Rafter and Mary Gibson, Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman*, Duke University Press, London, 2004, pp.15-23.

⁶Cesare Lombroso, *L'uomo delinquente*, Fratelli Bocca, Torino, 1889.

characteristics of criminals were the result of adaptation during the evolution of the human species, enabling offenders to perform their role. Considering criminals abnormal, Lombroso compared their physical features and behaviour to those of normal people. In doing so, he identified certain physical characteristics that belonged only to criminals and defined them as 'anomalies'.

Similarly, Lombroso applied the above findings to describe female criminality in his subsequent work *The Female Offender*.⁷ Curiously, unlike *L'uomo delinquente*, this book was immediately translated into English in 1895 (two years after the first Italian edition) yet not in its unabridged version.⁸ According to Lombroso, contrary to the trend in male criminality, occasional female criminals far outnumbered born female ones.

In the first part of the work, the criminologist provided the reader with a detailed description of the individual physical characteristics of women criminals noted and reported by his collaborators.⁹ These relied on measurements of the weight and circumference of women's skulls, classifications of characteristics of hair, jaws, teeth, cheeks and the numbers of moles and tattoos. A few chapter titles should give a good idea of their *modus operandi* grounded on a pseudo-scientific biological method: *The Skull of the Female Criminal* (I), *Pathological Anomalies in Female Criminals* (II), *Anthropometry of Female Criminals* (IV), and *Facial and Cephalic Anomalies in Female Criminals*.

In the second part of the volume, Lombroso explained that female offenders were different from males as they were much fewer in number and presented fewer criminal-type degenerative features. To demonstrate the above outcome he produced statistics and put forward the theory of atavism. According to this theory, anomalies in criminals, consisting of primitive physical and psychological characteristics, were caused by their primordial state of human evolution. By comparison, since women have never reached a high evolutionary state, their regression was only slight and lower compared to that of men. To quote Lombroso: 'The remarkable rarity of anomalies (already revealed by their crania) is not a new phenomenon in the female, nor does it contradict the undoubted fact that atavistically she is nearer her origin than the male and ought consequently to abound more in anomalies'.¹⁰ Yet, this did not occur because women, claimed Lombroso, were

⁷ Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, *The Female Offender*, Fisher Unwin, London, 1895.

⁸ To draw a confront of various editions, Lombroso and Ferrero, *Criminal Woman*, pp. 241-255.

⁹ Among his collaborators there was also a woman, Pauline Tarnowsky, who interestingly paid attention to social conditions in the explanation of crime more than her male colleagues did.

¹⁰ Lombroso and Ferrero, *The Female Offender*, p.107.

congenitally less inclined to crime than men and therefore 'atavism must be held to account for this fact, savage females, and, even more so, civilised females, being by nature less ferocious than men'.¹¹ To him, the smaller number of female criminals stemmed from

the conservative tendency of women in all questions of social orders; a conservatism whose primary cause should be sought in the immobility of the ovule compared with the zoosperm. Add to this that the female, on whom falls the larger share of the duty of bringing up the family, necessarily leads a more sedentary life and is less exposed than the male to the varying conditions of time and space in her environment.¹²

Therefore, the rare cases of born female criminals contravened not only criminal law but also, and above all, moral law, namely what was considered proper behaviour for women by society at the turn of the last century. That is why female offenders were regarded worse than their male counterparts. Indeed, Lombroso not only attributed the same features of male criminals to born female criminals but also those kinds of attitudes commonly considered the dark side of women: cruelty, cunning, spitefulness, deceit and so on. In addition, he found female criminals had no maternal instinct and that this lack was the clearest proof they were completely abnormal.

Mention must be made of the fact that Lombroso referred to social factors as well in explaining the reasons for the behaviour of occasional criminals. However, his attention to environmental aspects was limited since the prevailing explanation of criminal behaviour was based on physiological factors. Hence, even in cases where he attempted to understand the phenomenon from a socio-environmental standpoint, he eventually related criminal behaviour to the innate features of women. This was evident when he explained domestic theft as a need of poor people, speaking of 'excessive temptation', and later attributed it to the needs of the vain nature of women.¹³

There is no doubt Lombroso's speculations had an enduring negative effect on sexual ideology in Italian society, since his thesis offered bourgeois culture a scientific justification which 'tended to remove the problem of cultural and professional emancipation for woman with scientific arguments, such as lower brain weight, suffering during menstruation, pregnancy, and tasks related to breastfeeding and raising children'.¹⁴

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 110.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 119.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁴ Anna Bravo, Margherita Pelaja, Alessandra Pescarolo, Lucetta Scaraffia (a cura di), *Storia sociale delle donne nell'Italia contemporanea*, Laterza, Bari, 2001, p. 52. For the influence of Lombroso's thought on Italian society in terms of gender system, Margherita Pelaja, 'Il cambiamento dei comportamenti sessuali', in *ibid.*, p. 184.

An echo of his thought could be found in the attitude of the criminal justice system, which in the past considered women not criminally chargeable because of their supposed inferiority.¹⁵ In the case of mafia women, there have been cases, such as a rule analysed in chapter six which dated back to 1986, where judges tended to consider women's nature not capable of committing crimes. It might therefore be argued that the above view was a legacy of Lombroso's theory, which strengthened female stereotypes based on a dichotomic interpretation of gender differences on the basis of biology.

Although the principles and methods of Lombroso and his school are nowadays anachronistic and devoid of any intellectual validity, it must be admitted he was the first theorist to deal with an issue that had been neglected and overlooked by mainstream social science, and devoted a book entirely to female criminals. Notwithstanding his pseudo-scientific standpoint, elements of Lombroso's studies are valuable if he is regarded within the social context of his own time. His analysis looked at the differences between men and women from a gendered standpoint. Although his picture of female criminals was undoubtedly negative compared to that of men, he at least endeavoured to face the issue.

The same consideration is valid for William Thomas's attempts to understand female criminality. The influence of Lombroso's positivist paradigm was very evident in Thomas's first volume, *Sex and Society*, but more attenuated in his later work *The Unadjusted Girl*.¹⁶ In the former the author wholly overlooked cultural and social aspects in understanding female behaviour. On the contrary, he stressed the influence of sex on social behaviour. As he explained: '(...) the different bodies of men and women, particularly the greater strength, restlessness and motor aptitude of man, and the more stationary condition of women, have had an important influence on social forms and activities, and on the character and mind of the two sexes.'¹⁷

A decade later, a new epistemology focussed more on social factors became widespread in the US and influenced Thomas' work.¹⁸ However, in studying the aetiology of crime, he still concentrated on characteristics of the single individual rather than the socio-environmental context. Therefore he believed that interventions to prevent and combat criminality had to be directed at individuals rather than society. According to his theory,

¹⁵Marina Graziosi, 'Infermitas sexus. La donna nell'immaginario penalistico', *Democrazia e Diritto*, 2, 1993.

¹⁶William I. Thomas, *The Unadjusted Girl*, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1967 (first edition 1923).

¹⁷William I. Thomas, *Sex and Society: Studies in Social Psychology of Sex*, Fisher Unwin, London, 1907, p. V.

¹⁸Thomas belonged to Chicago School which brought important changes in the social sciences in the 1920s.

both innate and social elements influenced criminal behaviour. However, the environmental factors were mere means whereby human beings showed their instincts in society. To quote Thomas himself: 'Influences are partly inborn, representing the original nature of men, the so-called instincts, and partly the claims, appeals, rewards and punishment of society - the influences of social environment.'¹⁹ This became clearer in his 'theory of wishes', which stated the different wishes of human beings fell into four categories: the desire for new experience, the desire for security, the desire for response, and the desire for recognition. All of these were innate. Human behaviour was 'an adaptation to the environment, and the nervous system itself was a developmental adaptation'.²⁰ According to the author, the effects of wishes in the individual depended on their own character and were 'the motor element, the starting point of activity'.²¹ In other words, a dichotomy existed between innate desires, led by instincts, and the good of society, made up of the repression of instincts and the adaptation of wishes to society. This argument stemmed from the tradition of contractualism, as emerges from the author's words: 'There is always a rivalry between the spontaneous definitions of the situation made by the member of an organized society and the definitions which his society has provided for him (...). An organized society seeks also to regulate the conflict and competition inevitable between its members in the pursuit of their wishes'.²² So as a result, criminal behaviour grew out of the dichotomy between personal wishes and the rules of society, indispensable for its survival. The clash between the two (personal wishes and social rules) arose especially during periods of global change. Thomas believed that during his era 'the world in general has been profoundly changed in content, ideals and organization', following 'mechanical inventions, facilitated communication, diffusion of print, the growth of cities'.²³ Such changes led to a redefinition of the social context, leading primordial and inborn wishes to face a new environmental situation dominated by a new model of life. This could have a dangerous impact on those defined by Thomas as 'excluded from general participation in life- the mature woman and the young girl'.²⁴ As a consequence of rapid changes in social values, these people became demoralised and involved in criminality. The departure from their classic roles, traditionally accepted by

¹⁹ Thomas, *The Unadjusted Girl*, p. 1.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 2.

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 39.

²² *ibid.*, pp. 234-249.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 70.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 72.

society, provoked the frustration of deprivation and thus led to deviance. Interestingly Thomas caught the effect of gendered education in terms of criminality thus anticipating sociological theories by recognising that ‘civilized societies (...) have endowed the young girl with a character of social sacredness. (...) “Virginity” and “Purity” have almost a magical value. A girl as a child does not know she has any particular value until she learns it from others, but if she is regarded with adoration she correspondingly respects herself and tends to become what is expected of her.’²⁵

The body of his theory mirrored the reductive image of women and the double standard in terms of the widespread sexual morality of the 1920s. In other words, as Carol Smart pointed out, Thomas reflected the liberalism of his own time, which was the basis, for instance, of his firm belief in so-called ‘pre-delinquency work’, namely the identification of ‘criminal tendencies’ in young people. What Thomas considered signs enabling society to see that certain behaviour might develop into further deviance ‘were the product of middle-class values and a double-standard of morality for males and females. (...)’.²⁶

In spite of the above drawbacks stemming from his belonging to a specific cultural and social context, Thomas’s discourse on women as subjects who were frustrated during times of changes is illuminating in understanding what women might experience by living in a mafia family, traditional in terms of gender expectations, and at the same time perceiving external social changes. This process should be kept in mind when analysing certain forms of behaviour of women inside the mafia: whether they attempt to undertake a criminal career thereby seeking ‘public’ space within the underworld, or decide to abandon the mafia thereby seeking to liberate themselves from male mafia constraints. As will become clearer later, both attitudes could be provoked by the perception of the gap between women’s achievements in the legitimate world and the retrograde conditions for women under the mafia system.

Finally, one of the main merits of Thomas’s approach should be stressed here, namely the use of what he called the ‘human document’: case studies grounded in interviews with young deviant girls.²⁷ As Frances Heidensohn wrote, he ‘was a pioneer of the use of case study materials in social research’.²⁸ This method had an important legacy, since it began a qualitative approach to the study of female crime. Again, as with Lombroso, Thomas’s

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 82.

²⁶ Smart, *Women, Crime and Criminology*, pp. 41-42.

²⁷ Thomas, *The Unadjusted Girl*, p. 249.

²⁸ Heidensohn, *Women and Crime*, p. 116.

attempt to deal with women criminals was significant since they were neglected during his period because of their crime rate compared to male offenders.

Let us now turn to the analysis of Otto Pollak's *The Criminality of Women* published in 1950 and regarded as one of the most reliable and important works on female criminality up till the 1970s when feminist scholars started to challenge his interpretation. The starting point of his theory is that the nature of female criminality has been masked since a large number of offences committed by women remained hidden. Therefore, the real figure of women involved in crime did not correspond to police data.

Pollak listed the reasons most women criminals were never discovered: life in the private sphere, the chivalrous attitude of investigators, the passive role in sexual intercourse, and finally the characteristics of their victims. Their traditional housekeeping role, meaning women had to stay at home, allowed them to keep their crimes hidden. Basically, the private sphere was ideal for concealing female crime. In fact, the author believed that women abused their social role for criminal purposes. Such analysis led him to explain the increase in female criminality by stating that the changing position of women in society had led them in part outside the sheltered world of the home that had once allowed them to hide their crimes.

The lenient treatment of women in the criminal processing system was another reason data recorded on female crime did not correspond to the real picture. Justice and law enforcement officers were reluctant to arrest, convict and punish women for offences they had committed. This assumption, known as the 'chivalry thesis', received wide support. Later, this study will deal with the debate on this theory from Pollak to current scholarship since it has been one of the most controversial themes in the field of female crime. Within this debate we will locate our discussion on the relationship between mafia women and the criminal justice system.

The author attributed another reason for hidden female criminality to biology, namely what he called 'biological factors in female crime'.²⁹ In other words, female criminal behaviour was bound to female generative phases, i.e. menstruation, pregnancy and menopause. He deemed that during menstruation women showed their desire for revenge for not being men; that pregnancy was directly bound to crimes such as abortion and infanticide thus demonstrating women were biologically inclined to criminality during

²⁹Otto Pollak, *The Criminality of Women*, A.S. Barnes, New York, 1961, pp.125-134.

pregnancy; and finally, that menopause might lead women to commit crimes because it represented for them the loss of womanhood and thus caused depression and irritability.³⁰ However, Pollak also reported that a direct correlation between generative phases and crime had not yet been statistically demonstrated. For this reason he suggested further studies to find that connection.³¹ Finally, he held that women's tendency to deceive stemmed from female physiology, namely their passivity during sexual intercourse. Women were passive by nature and as such could lie about sexual arousal whereas a man could not because his potential sexual failure would be evident.

The last reason given that female criminality was easily masked relied on the kind of people women chose as victims: e.g., children, lovers or husbands who were not likely to report women's offences. This was because children were unable to understand the situation and lovers, as well as husbands, had close relationships with the offender, thus they 'are less inclined to bring complaint to the authorities than the victims of male criminals.'³²

Pollak mentioned that sociological factors might also stimulate female crime. These included: the double standard of sexual morality, which discriminated against women in terms of sexual behaviour (i.e. society allowed men all types of behaviour but was very strict with regards to women); 'the modern sales-promotion methods in the retail sector with their concentration on the female shopper'; and the 'specific female occupation of domestic employment with its many irritations and frustrations'.³³

Pollak's assumptions were not grounded in empirical data or reliable evidence but instead reflected common social beliefs of the period and gave folk wisdom scientific reliability. His reflections regarding female passiveness evidently contributed to strengthening the stigma of women as not adapted to do some jobs traditionally considered male.

Delinquency in Girls (1968), by John Cowie, Valerie Cowie and Eliot Slater, showed that the tradition of the biological-deterministic approach was alive even fifteen years later.³⁴ The authors distinguished between 'normality' and 'abnormality' and maintained that delinquent girls had a pathological nature. Their empirical study compared girls who

³⁰ *ibid.*, p.131.

³¹ *ibid.*, p.140.

³² *ibid.*, p.140.

³³ *ibid.*, p.158.

³⁴ John Cowie, Valerie Cowie and Eliot Slater, *Delinquency in Girls*, Heinemann, London, 1968.

committed offences to girls who did not and observed differences between them in an attempt to single out the reasons for female criminality, which was eventually ascribed to physiological features.

In order to give a theoretical justification to their work, they mentioned those earlier studies that demonstrated the abnormality of delinquency. These studies included *The Young Delinquent* (1925) by Cyril Burt who indicated 'handicapped' factors as a motive for criminal behaviour, which emerged 'over a wide range of fields of observations: physically, intellectually, and temperamentally'.³⁵ Cowie and his co-authors also made reference to Katharine Lumpkin (1931-32) who, after performing intelligence tests on delinquent girls, concluded they showed very low average intelligence. Finally, Cowie's main reference was the well-known 1934 study by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, who compared the life histories of five hundred women in a Massachusetts reformatory to five hundred non-criminal women.³⁶ Based on photographs of the analysed subjects, they constructed body types classified as the following: the 'mesomorph' with a muscular and athletic physique, the 'ectomorph' who tended to be fatigued and withdrawn, and the 'endomorph' who had a relaxed and comfortable disposition. According to the Gluecks, mesomorphic young people were more likely to have personality traits, such as aggressiveness, insensitivity, and emotional instability, which made them likely to commit offences. In fact, they found that 60% of the criminals were mesomorphs while only 31% of the non-criminals fit the mesomorphic classification. Without doubt their huge study contributed to strengthening the positivist tradition.

Cowie *et al.* also rarely took environmental factors into account in their analysis of delinquency. Yet, they treated these as secondary elements compared to those linked to physiology. In chapters devoted to the social conditions of the families of the delinquent girls, the authors, worried about the objectivity of this kind of data, measured them statistically, listing those elements that could contribute to pushing the nature of the girls toward criminality. They thus hoped to give a scientific quality to their work out of an obsession with numbers and taxonomies. In doing so, they shared the belief of the positivist tradition that using a quantitative method also for analysing socio-environmental factors would give their research a high degree of objectivity.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 6.

³⁶ Sol Sheldon Glueck and Eleanor Touroff Glueck, *Five Hundred Delinquent Women*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1934.

In their conclusion, they explained that criminality was bound to masculinity. This was not considered a cultural result but rather a genetically given factor. Their theory stated that given the fact the chromosome determining masculinity was Y (since the genetic structure of men was XY and of women XX), delinquent women must have an abnormal chromosome structure because, if they were criminal, they had to be masculine.³⁷

Before moving to classical sociological theories of crime, it is worth emphasizing that the analysis of early theories might appear irrelevant to this thesis. But dusting them off may help us understand their legacy in the contemporary world, particularly in relation to the double standard in social gender expectations. By underlying the drawbacks of these theories, which justified ‘scientifically’ cultural discrimination, we learn to go beyond those stereotypes that often are well-masked and were meant to describe reality. This kind of approach, namely deconstructing a well-established ‘reality’, becomes fundamental in studying mafia women. At the same time, it is worth remembering that the attempts of the scholars seen so far were pioneering and crucial in order to pave the way for further study of female criminality.

³⁷Cowie et al., *Delinquency in Girls*, p. 37.

1. 2. Classical sociological theories of criminology

A new sociological approach arose in the mid-twentieth century, although it brought no meaningful changes in analysing female criminality or any more concern for it. Even the Critical approach, although it produced a pivotal epistemological shift in criminology in the late 1970s and early 1980s, also ignored the matter. Only since the 1970s the science of criminology received new perspectives and methods for studying female crime from feminist thought. This section will look at sociological theories of criminology by providing a synthesis of their fundamental principles, and secondly by applying them to female criminality.¹

Let us start with the theories rooted in the sociological Chicago School (1920s-1960s), namely the Anomie, Sub-cultural and Different Opportunity theories. The father of 'Anomie theory', also known as 'Strain theory', was Robert Merton who borrowed the notion of anomie from sociologist Emile Durkheim.² Merton used the term, meaning 'without norms', to explain a lawless social condition in which rules were relaxed. He felt American society during his period was in a state of anomie, as socio-economic changes occurred, leading to a new ideology grounded in money. As a result of such ideology, people desired to reach a high economic level and yet were unable to obtain it. This occurred because of a gap between the goals stimulated by society and means supplied by it. This situation was particularly true for the lower classes that were disadvantaged in terms of educational and occupational opportunity and forced to overcome great barriers in order to obtain social and economic success. Merton maintained that one of the responses to strain was employing 'deviant behaviour' whereby 'strained' people balanced their frustration.³ In other words, 'deviant behaviour results when people want to attain the socially accepted goals (financial success) but do not have the legitimate means to do so (a lucrative job).'⁴

Later, sociologist Albert Cohen applied the strain theory to the behaviour of lower-class adolescent males through observation.⁵ He noticed they tackled the impossibility of

¹This theoretical attempt was carried out by Ngaire Naffine in *Female Crime: the Construction of Women in Criminology*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1987 and by Eileen Bleonard Leonard in *Women, Crime and Society: A Critique of Theoretical Criminology*, Longman, New York, 1982.

²Robert Merton, 'Social Structure and Anomie', *American Sociological Review*, 3, October 1938, pp. 672-682. Emile Durkheim, *Suicide*, Routledge, London, 1952.

³For a description of five responses to strain formulated by Merton, Leonard, *Women, Crime*, pp.119-121.

⁴Leonard, 'Theoretical Criminology', in Raffel Price and Sokoloff, *The Criminal Justice*, p. 55.

⁵Albert Kircidel Cohen, *Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang*, Routledge, London, 1956.

meeting middle-class standards by creating an alternative culture (subculture) wherein they could reach a status and be accepted. Since they were excluded from the race to achieve the goals dictated by middle-class criteria of responsibility and acceptance, they used illegitimate means advocated by their subculture.

Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin's differential opportunity theory stemmed from the work of Merton and Edward Sutherland that we will soon explore.⁶ Indeed, they referred to the gap between goals and means and believed criminal behaviour was learned. Once lower-class boys encountered frustration due to experiencing the gap, they employed behaviour that was influenced by the sort of illegitimate opportunities available in their community. Though Merton almost wholly overlooked the question, Cohen and Ohlin investigated female criminals in contrast with juvenile male criminals. They identified desires proper to women and men, regarding male criminality as the result of tension provoked by the frustration coming from the impossibility of gaining power, money and success. Society proposed male values and goals that did not concern women. As Ngaire Naffine pointed out referring to Cohen's observations: 'His characterisation of what is valued in American culture, he says, is the *modus vivendi* of the successful male, not the female. Autonomy, rationality, ambition and restraint with one's emotions are the attributes of the person who makes it in America, but the person is male (...)'.⁷ As women were only devoted to private sphere, they did not participate in the race for society's public goals. Consequently, they did not use illegal opportunities to reach them. The attention to women by anomie/strain theorists was reductive since the few passing references to them were always in relation to male analysis. Women were studied only as the antithesis of men. Similarly, as we will see, until the late 1980s mafia studies tended to refer to women simply as male counterparts.

Ruth Morris in 1964 was the first scholar to attempt to specifically apply the strain theory to women and overcome the simplistic findings proposed by her predecessors that women only strained in searching for a husband.⁸ Morris's closer analysis was shown by her empirical research on both male and female, delinquent and non-delinquent youths. According to her findings, delinquent girls were more likely to come from broken homes

⁶Edwin Sutherland and Donald Cressey, *Principles of Criminology*, Lippincott, Chicago, 1966. Richard Cloward and Lloyd Edward Ohlin, *Delinquency and Opportunity: a Theory of Delinquent Gangs*, Routledge, London, 1961.

⁷Naffine, *Female Crime*, p. 11.

⁸Ruth Morris, 'Female Delinquency and Relational Problems', *Social Forces*, October 1964, 43, pp. 82-88.

than the other group. From there, she gave a more thorough picture by including other aspects in her analysis.

Generally speaking, it is interesting to note that women, due to their historically submissive condition, have always experienced a lack of opportunity as compared to men, especially in the public sphere. Thus, strain theory might be particularly useful in studying the female subject.

A turning point in the history of criminology was marked by Edwin Sutherland's theory of differential association (1883-1950), which produced a huge shift in perspective. By refuting the biological paradigm, which stated that criminal behaviours were innate, his theory, along with other theories comprising the field of social learning theory, stated that human behaviour was a result of learning and socialisation with other people.

Sutherland listed the so-called 'principles of criminology', which clearly sum up his thought: 1) criminal behaviour is learned; 2) criminal behaviour is learned in interaction with other persons in a process of communication; 3) the principal part of learning criminal behaviour occurs within intimate personal groups; 4) when criminal behaviour is learned, the learning includes (a) techniques for committing a crime, sometimes very complicated and sometimes very simple, and (b) the specific direction of motives, drives, rationalisations, and attitudes; 5) the specific direction of motives and drives is learned from definition of legal codes as favourable or unfavourable; 6) a person becomes criminal because of an excess of definitions favourable to violation of the law over definitions unfavourable to violation of the law; 7) differential associations may vary in frequency, duration, priority, and intensity; 8) the process of learning criminal behaviour by association with criminal and anti-criminal patterns involves all the same mechanisms involved in any other kind of learning; 9) while criminal behaviour is an expression of general needs and values, it is not explained by those general needs and values since non-criminal behaviour is an expression of the same needs and values.⁹

It is clear from the above principles that whether any given behaviour becomes criminal or not depends on the kind of association involved. This association may occur within a group where there are either more definitions favourable to violation of the law or more unfavourable ones. The type of association (pro or anti-law), the result of a learning process, depends on several variables: frequency (how often the contacts were made),

⁹Leonard, *Women, Crime*, p. 107.

duration (the length of the contacts), priority (at what stage of life the contacts started), and intensity (how significant the contacts were for the individual). Sutherland also stressed that learning was most effective within intimate personal groups such as peer groups and the family. Accepting a criminal pattern as a model of behaviour means learning both its techniques and rationalisations. In other words, committing a crime requires, on the one hand, knowing practical methods and, on the other, finding a moral justification for that behaviour.

In the preface to 'Principles of Criminology', written in collaboration with Donald Cressie, Sutherland insisted he would not overlook a gendered prospective. Instead, he made only few passing references to females and depicted women through the usual stereotypes thus dealing solely with male delinquency and not providing a gender-neutral reading of criminality. However, other scholars used Sutherland's theoretical framework to study female criminality. They grasped the potential of his theory to understand gender differences and similarities in criminal involvement. The most consequent assumption is that 'females (...) lack the opportunity for contact with adolescent groups, (...) and this further limits the possibility of learning criminal behaviour. Even within the same groups as males (like the family), their social position is unequal, and they are frequently taught dissimilar attitudes.'¹⁰ Therefore 'the differential treatment of males and females may culminate (...) with women exposed to an excessive number of definitions of behaviour unfavourable to violating the law.'¹¹

Interestingly, Leonard applied each of Sutherland's nine principles to female criminality, providing a theoretical construction without empirical cases.¹² According to her, if crime was learned within intimate groups, then women were much less likely to learn criminal behaviour since for most females the crucial primary group was the family. Given that female socialisation was stricter compared to that of males and women were traditionally more tightly bound to the family, it should also be mentioned that they lacked the opportunities males had for contact with other intimate personal groups. Therefore, Leonard maintained that in populous communities, and groups that treated women more equitably, greater opportunity existed to learn the techniques and rationalisations of crime since it was more difficult to control or protect women in these situations.

¹⁰ Leonard, 'Theoretical Criminology', in Raffel Price and Sokoloff, *The Criminal Justice*, p. 60.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 60.

¹² Leonard, *Women, Crime*, p. 109.

In the case of women inside the mafia, and thus belonging to a mafia family, they can learn mafia principles without being involved in mafia-related crime. This contradiction is fundamental in order to understand the ambiguous condition of mafia women that results in the lack of correspondence between moral law and criminal law. This complex issue will be treated in chapter six where we will amply use also the labelling theory, whose assumptions derive from the theory of symbolic interactionism. This states we are in interaction with others and define ourselves in terms of others' definitions of us.¹³ Applying this concept to criminality means shifting the focus from those who commit crime to those who define it as such. Thus, the concern turns from individual action to social reaction.

According to labelling theorists, branding behaviours as deviant changes with time and culture since deviance is contingent on them. That is why they did not trust the picture given by official data since they regarded this data as influenced by class, race and sexual bias. Instead, they believed case studies and participant observations were preferable in grasping the reality of deviance beyond conventional stereotypes. The major concern of these theorists was the potential consequences of a criminal brand on the further behaviour of the labelled. The scholar Edwin Lemert distinguished between primary deviance and secondary deviance. Rather than dig into the causes of primary deviance, he investigated the secondary as a result of the primary. He believed whoever was labelled a deviant was likely to employ that image of himself and behave consequently.

The main proponents of this approach included Frank Tannenbaum, John Kitsuse, Kai Erikson, and Howard Becker, who defined deviance as '(...) a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an offender (...)'.¹⁴ This finding was the result of his field research on a group of jazz musicians considered outsiders by society due to their irregular life.

As seen above, labelling theory stated that one of the variables involved in the response to rule breaking depends on the person who violates the rule. Thus characteristics such as the sex of the offender may play a crucial role. Moreover this approach can offer interesting insights, particularly in reading the gender ratio problem, specifically the lower

¹³Gorge Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1934.

¹⁴Frank Tannenbaum, *Crime and the Community*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1951; Edwin M. Lemert, 'Beyond Mead: the Societal Reaction to Deviance', *Social Problems*, 21, April 1974, pp. 457-468; John Kitsuse, 'Societal Reaction to Deviant Behaviour: Problems of Theory and Method', *Social problems*, 11, 1963, pp. 131-139; Kai T. Erikson, *Wayward Puritans. A Study in the Sociology of Deviance*, Wiley, New York, 1966. Howard Soul Becker, *Outsider: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, the Free Press, New York, 1966, p.9.

number of female offenders. Women and men are labelled differently due to different socialization processes. Because they are more controlled both privately and publicly than men, women are educated to be particularly sensitive to the reactions of others. Generally speaking, they receive the label from the community to be 'nice' and not aggressive, and consequently build their own self-image in conformity with such a label. As a result, they start a positive career thanks to a positive label. Contrarily, the 'positive' career of women might stem from their fear of being labelled negatively since social reaction to female delinquency is greater than that of males. Such discrimination is due to a gendered moral double standard, which implies different reactions toward criminality. Generally speaking, male delinquents were considered criminals, while female delinquents were seen as mentally ill. Society prefers to think of women who commit crime as sick rather than criminal. Until recently society did not accept that women could be criminals since criminality was considered an attribute of masculinity.

The female image described above may have caused more lenient treatment of women by the criminal justice system. Considering women as removed from criminal behaviour, due to their traditional roles as mothers and wives, contributed both to avoiding suspicion and garnering the sympathy of officials. Avoiding being recorded in official data meant escaping the kind of official labelling that lead to secondary deviance. Stopping at primary delinquency enabled women to avoid a deviant path. Scholar Edwin Schur maintained that women's lack of secondary deviance explained the gender ratio problem since women were protected by a degree of positive labelling.¹⁵ According to some observers, labelling theory provided an explanation for the increase in female crime over the past few decades. Such a rise has been grounded in the decline of the positive label traditionally attributed to women who are no longer protected by their traditional image. Moreover, they are more under suspicion than in the past since it is commonly believed the role of women has undergone an overwhelming change, enabling them to commit crime. Chapter six will investigate the extent to which this general change in gender expectation has impinged on societal reaction towards mafia women. Moreover, by discussing the relationship between mafia women and the criminal justice system, chapter six will make reference to two of Becker's concepts: the 'secret deviant', someone who breaks a rule but is not witnessed

¹⁵Edwin Schur, *Labelling Women Deviant: Gender, Stigma, and Social Control*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1983.

and therefore not labelled; and the 'deviant career', the path undertaken by one stigmatised as a deviant.

Consideration will be given now to social control theory, which shifted the focus of attention from delinquency to conformity, namely to people who did not commit crime. The main proponent of this theory was Travis Hirschi who argued we could all have been lawbreakers if we had not been restricted by social controls.¹⁶ What kinds of controls are at work in avoiding delinquent behaviour? Hirschi considered four categories of social bonds that restrain individuals from law breaking. Such bonds were organized insofar as the weakness of one might lead to the weakness of another. 'Attachment' relates to the will to maintain good and solid affective relationships. (Delinquent behaviour would damage them). 'Commitment' refers to the degree people want to pursue conformist types of conduct. 'Involvement' relates to the engagement in lawful activities that leave no time for lawless activities (employment and recreation). 'Belief' is related to ties to the rules of society.

Given his concern with conformity as opposed to criminality, one would expect Hirschi to take the female subject into account. Yet he merely underlined the fact that the female subject, being overly controlled, conformed to the rules of society. Social control theory provides a wide range of suggestions for studying female crime. This becomes evident when considering the fact that women make up the part of society most in conformity with its rules. There is no doubt that embracing the most representative case of conformity (i.e. women) within the theory claiming to study conformity would support the theory itself. On the other hand, some concepts borrowed from social control theory, like the notion of conformity and its related question 'Why do women not usually break the law?' would be appropriate to the study of female crime. As we know, the number of female criminals is inferior to that of men. But since they are conditioned by numerous social bonds, women are also more socially controlled than men. Therefore the social control theory is particularly valid if tested on women. Much research has been carried out on the relationship between the strength of social bonds and pro or anti-law behaviour, including analysis of potential gender differences.¹⁷ As we shall see in the next section, one of the

¹⁶Travis Hirschi, *Causes of Delinquency*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1969.

¹⁷Gary Jensen and Raymond Eve, 'Sex Differences in Delinquency', *Criminology*, 24, 1976, pp. 65-84. Michael Hindelang, 'Cases of Delinquency: a Partial Replication and Extension', *Social Problems*, 21, 1973, p. 471. Josephine Figueira-McDonough, William H. Barton, and Rosemary C. Sarri, 'Normal Deviance:

main feminist patterns in studying female crime relies on the notion of social control, which is particularly appropriate for exploring women's conditions.¹⁸

Later on, this thesis will apply some of the criminological notions seen in this section to explain several cases of women involved in the mafia. Here the lesson to bear in mind from the above theoretical reflections should be simply to avoid reducing women offenders to opposites of men. Mere gender comparisons are reductive and yet they are necessary in drawing a much more complex picture. Similarly, any analysis of the historical transformation of women's tasks in the mafia as something separate or in contrast to male tasks would be reductive. As we will see, the gender system in the mafia has to do with more than a mere division of labour.

1. 3. *Criminology and feminist thought*

Defining feminist criminology brings up a number of questions. Theoretical issues concerning the relationship between feminism and criminology have produced many works that are difficult to label.¹⁹ Therefore, this section has been given the all-encompassing title 'criminology and feminist thought' in reference to numerous feminist contributions to criminology.²⁰ This section hence will give us an overview of the key points shared by feminist approaches to female crime, and of the main feminist heuristic patterns for explaining and describing female crime. Before exploring this, it will be useful to have a chronological indication of the landmarks of feminist work on female crime.

Frances Heidensohn was the first scholar to react against the neglect of the female subject in criminology.²¹ In a pioneering article in 1968, she underlined the flaws of the biological-deterministic approach and shifted the focus to socialization factors. She suggested that criminological analysis should be grounded in the theory of social roles that

Gender Similarities in Adolescent Subcultures', pp. 17-45, in Marguerite Warren (edited by), *Comparing Female and Male Offenders*, Sage, Beverly Hills, 1981.

¹⁸Heidensohn, *Women and Crime*, p.106.

¹⁹Loraine Gelsthorpe and Allison Morris, *Feminist Perspectives in Criminology*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1990; Daly and Meda Chesney-Lind, 'Feminism and Criminology', *Justice Quarterly*, 5, 1988; Ngaire Naffine, *Gender, Crime and Feminism*, Dartmouth, Aldershot, 1995; Ngaire Naffine, *Feminism and Criminology*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1997; Frances Heidensohn, 'Gender and Crime' in Maguire, Morgan, Reiner (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook*, pp.761-798; J. Young, 'Incessant Chatter: Recent Paradigms in Criminology', in *ibid.*; Nicole Hahn Rafter and Frances Heidensohn, *International Feminist Perspectives in Criminology*, Open University Press, Buckingham, 1995; Carol Smart, 'Feminist Approaches to Criminology or Postmodern Women Meets Atavistic Man', in Gelsthorpe and Morris, *Feminist Perspectives*.

²⁰Gelsthorpe and Morris speak of *feminist perspectives in criminology* by which they 'meant that critical insights within different kinds of feminism could be used to transform and transgress both theory and the politics of research and action in criminology', Gelsthorpe and Morris, *Feminist Perspectives*, p.4.

²¹Frances Heidensohn, 'The Deviance of Women: a Critique and an Enquiry', *British Journal of Sociology*, 19, 1968, pp. 160-75.

recognizes masculinity and femininity as results of cultural construction, and that ethnographic researches should be conducted.²² Her concepts gave rise to crucial questions that were faced later by Heidensohn herself and other feminist scholars.

Another article by Dorie Klein is also considered an important starting point for the new approach in reading female crime.²³ In it, she reviewed theorists of female crime from Cesare Lombroso to the late 1960s and criticized them from the standpoint of their historical context. At the time she wrote the article, she was a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley, School of Criminology where she was influenced by the climate of the 1970s. Her concern indeed was on questions such as 'the impact of the political economy, racism, and sexism on the causes and definitions of female crime.'²⁴ Moreover she 'called for social change of the broader society instead of focussing on the rehabilitation of the individual female offender'.²⁵

In 1976, Carol Smart published *Women, Crime and Criminology*, the first feminist book on female crime.²⁶ This book grew out of the early second wave of the liberation movement and dealt with a whole range of aspects not only about women and criminality but also about women as victims of offences. In the section devoted to a review of the literature on the subject, she dwells in great detail on the assumptions of early authors in order to condemn those scholars who, anachronistically during her era, used a positivistic approach in reading female crime.

In the early 1980s, sociologist Frances Heidensohn published the most complete volume to date on women and crime. Embracing her twenty-years of research, it provided the reader with a thorough compendium of a great variety of themes.²⁷ In the second edition, a useful guide to the by then extensive literature on female crime, she also pointed out the advantages of using the concept of 'conformity', borrowed from social control theory.

Let us now direct our attention to the fundamental points of feminist criminological thought. Broadly speaking, feminist criminologists claimed that traditional theories of

²²According to Carol Smart role theorists failed 'to discuss motivation or intention as an integral part of female criminality. For example, role theory does not explain why, even though women are socialized into primarily conforming patterns of behaviour, a considerable number engage in crime', Smart, *Women, Crime and Criminology*, p.69.

²³Dorie Klein, 'The Aetiology of Female Crime: a Review of the Literature', *Issues in Criminology*, 3, 1973, pp. 3-30.

²⁴Dorie Klein, 'The Aetiology of Female Crime', in Raffel Price and Sokoloff (eds.), *The Criminal Justice* (2nd edition), p. 30.

²⁵*ibid.*, p.30.

²⁶Smart, *Women, Crime and Criminology*.

²⁷Heidensohn, *Women and Crime*.

female criminality showed two trends: amnesia or distortion. In fact, the discipline's mainstream either neglected to consider female crime or, when it did, misrepresented it. Therefore in order to understand this issue more thoroughly, feminist scholars have endeavoured to move beyond stereotypes in its treatment, a concern which is at the core of this thesis as well. As will be argued in chapter six, amnesia and distortion have characterised mafia studies in relation to female presence in the mafia.

Two matters are fundamental in feminist criminological thought: the so-called question of generalisability and the gender-ratio problem.²⁸ The first question relates to examining whether classical theories (such as anomie, control, differential association, conflict, labelling, social disorganization, and social learning theories) are just as valid when applied to female criminals since they were modelled to explain and understand male criminality and, as such, tested only on male delinquents. No agreement existed on the potential applicability of conventional theories to the study of female crime. Some maintained helpful suggestions could be found; others believed reading them from a gender perspective might bring about further distortions.²⁹ As we will see throughout the thesis, some theoretical interpretations created to explain male crime are useful to understand mafia women better.

Few feminists addressing the gender ratio problem considered why women commit much less crime than men.³⁰ As seen above, men, including early theorists on female crime, were keen on this theme since the less significant criminal behaviour of women was the clearest aspect of the matter.

Methodology was a pivotal point in characterising feminist perspectives since feminist scholars employed mostly qualitative methods grounded in the value of experience. In doing so, they pointed out the importance of being involved with 'the researched' by recognizing their subjectivity in a non-hierarchical way.³¹ One of the avenues of inquiry most undertaken were life histories that, as Maureen Cain observed,

²⁸Sally Simpson, 'Feminist Theory, Crime and Justice', *Criminology*, 27, 1989; Meda Chesney-Lind and Randall G. Shelden, *Girls, Delinquency, and Juvenile Justice*, West/Wadsworth, Belmont California, 1998; Kathleen Daly and Meda Chesney-Lind, 'Feminism and Criminology', *Justice Quarterly*, 5, 1988.

²⁹Allison Morris, *Women, Crime and Criminal Justice*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1987; Leonard, *Women, Crime*.

³⁰D.A. Smith and R. Paternoster, 'The Gender Gap in Theories of Deviance: Issues and Evidence', *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 24, 1987, pp. 140-172.

³¹Reinharz Shulamit, *On Becoming a Social Scientist: from Survey Research and Participant Observation to Experimental Analysis*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1979; Gloria Bowles and Renate Duely Klein, *Theories of Women Studies*, Routledge, London, 1983; Gelsthorpe and Morris, *Feminist Perspectives*.

in the context of criminology expose the practices of a range of penal and welfare agencies. They also reveal connections and disconnections, at the level of beliefs and ideologies, between these agencies and ordinary people- friends, family and so on. In these ways they make it possible to theorise the articulations between individual lives, institutions and the forms they take, and ideologies and structures of larger or societal scope, and to theorise these articulations in dynamic, processual way.³²

Another issue shared by feminists is the analysis of the treatment of female offenders by the criminal justice system. As we know, early theorists were concerned with this question as well. They suggested women were treated with more leniency compared to men thanks to the 'chivalry' of members of the criminal justice system at different stages (arrest, conviction, sentencing).³³ Some feminists agree with early theorists over the more lenient treatment of women but give another explanation of this attitude;³⁴ others feel the treatment of women in the justice system is unfair towards them due to their sex.³⁵ Both feminist views rely on the concept of paternalism. According to the first, chivalry conceals paternalistic behaviour, i.e. powerful men took care of women because of their alleged weakness and inferiority. The second is self-evident since condemning women to harsher punishments for some infractions is a clear expression of paternalism. For instance, until relatively recently in some countries, including Italy, adultery by women was regarded as a criminal offence while male adultery was seen as a civil offence.³⁶ The reasoning here is that adultery by women is more disruptive to the family than that by men.

To sum up, 'paternalism usually implies that women who behave in way that is congruent with traditional female roles of purity and submission receive preferential or lenient treatment, whereas women who violate those standards do not receive this benefit and may be dealt with more severely than males committing the same offences'.³⁷ Therefore, according to feminists, the paternal attitude of the criminal justice

³²Cain Maureen, 'Toward Transgression: New Directions in Feminist Criminology', in Naffine Ngaire, *Gender, Crime*, p. 450.

³³Thomas, *The Unadjusted Girl*; Pollack, *The Criminality of Women*.

³⁴A. Christy Visher, 'Gender, Police Arrest Decisions, and Notion of Chivalry', *Criminology*, 21, 1983, pp. 5-28; Morris, *Women, Crime*; Leonard, *Women, Crime*; Nagel Stuart and Lenore Weitzman, 'Double Standard of American Justice', *Society*, 9, 5, 1972, pp.171-98.

³⁵Gail Armstrong, 'Females Under the Law: "Protected" but Unequal', in Raffel Price and Sokoloff, *The Criminal Justice*; Kathleen Daly, *Gender, Crime and Punishment*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1994; Candace Kruttschnitt and Donald E. Green, 'The Sex-Sanctioning Issue: Is it History?', *American Sociological Review*, 49, 1984, pp. 541-51.

³⁶For the Italian case, Tamar Pitch, *Un diritto per due. La costruzione giuridica di genere, sesso e sessualità*, il Saggiatore, Milano, 1998.

³⁷Ruth Horowitz and Anne E. Pottieger, 'Gender Bias in Juvenile Justice Handling of Seriously Crime-involved Youths', *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 28, 1991, pp.75-100.

system towards women is one way that male-dominated society maintains control over women.³⁸ According to the findings of other studies, male and female offenders undergo the same treatment by the criminal processing system.³⁹ Finally, many scholars point out that gender is not the only variable that influences treatment by the criminal justice system.⁴⁰

The discourse regarding the risks of calling for female equality before the law is complex and delicate. As Carol Smart maintains, 'Law does not stand outside gender relations and adjudicate upon them. Law is part of these relations and is always already gendered in its principles and practices. We cannot separate out one practice –called discrimination –and ask for it to cease to be gendered as it would be a meaningless request.'⁴¹ She concludes, 'This is not to say we cannot object to certain principles and practices but we need to think carefully before we continue to sustain a conceptual framework which either prioritises men as the norm, or assumes that genderlessness (or gender-blindness) is either possible or desirable.'⁴² And finally she warned: '(...) Equality defined as equal treatment of men and women, especially when men's experiences and behaviour are taken as the norm, forestalls more fundamental change and in some instances may worsen women's circumstances.'⁴³

In discussing the development of the relationship between the criminal justice system and mafia women, this thesis will argue in chapter six that gender equality before the law is desirable. Annamaria Galoppini rightly maintains it is impossible to insert female specificity at the legal level. However there is room in the everyday exercise of the law to allow for consideration of female and new feminist values.⁴⁴

³⁸Charles J. Corley, Stephen Cernkovich and Peggy Giordano, 'Sex and the Likelihood of Sanction', *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 80, 1989; Meda Chesney-Lind and R.G. Shelden, *Girls, Delinquency and the Juvenile Justice System*, Pacific Grove, Brooks CA, 1998.

³⁹George Bridges, and Gina Beretta, 'Gender, Race, and Social Control: Toward an Understanding of Sex Disparities in Imprisonment', in George S. Bridges and Martha A. Myers (eds.), *Inequality, Crime and Social Control*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1994; Myers Martha, 'Gender and Southern Punishment After the Civil War', *Criminology*, 33, 1995.

⁴⁰Darrell Steffensmeier, John Kramer, and Cathy Streifel, 'Gender and Imprisonment Decisions', *Criminology*, 31, 1993. A detailed summary of studies supporting the chivalry hypothesis is to be found in Frank H. Julian, 'Gender and Crime: Different Sex, Different treatment?', in Concetta Culliver (edited by), *Female Criminality. The State of the Art*, Garland Publishing, New York, 1993.

⁴¹Carol Smart, 'Feminist Approaches to Criminology or Postmodern Woman meets Atavistic Man', in Gelsthorpe and Morris, *Feminist Perspectives*, p.80.

⁴²*ibid.*, p. 80.

⁴³*ibid.*, p.80.

⁴⁴Annamaria Galoppini, 'La lunga lotta per l'eguaglianza: dalla costituzione alla legge di parità', in Simonetta Ulivieri (a cura di), *Educazione e ruolo femminile*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze, 1992, p. 28.

Let us now look at the main patterns of feminist thought in relation to female delinquency. A significant and widespread pattern in feminist criminology for explaining female crime is based on the patriarchy theory.⁴⁵ Generally speaking, all feminists dealing with crime are sensitive to the patriarchal context in which the female subject studied is involved. However, the notion of patriarchy is not strictly used to explain female crime, but also to understand women's treatment by the criminal justice system -as just mentioned- and female victimization (rape and abuse at home).

Patriarchal structures permeate all aspects of society and consequentially also law, justice and punishment. As Meda Chesney-Lind observed: 'Clearly, harsh public punishment of a few "fallen" women as witches and whores has always been integral to enforcement of the boundaries of the "good" woman's place in patriarchal society. Anyone seriously interested in examining women's crime or the subjugation of women, then, must carefully consider the role of contemporary criminal justice systems in the maintenance of modern patriarchy.'⁴⁶ This discussion is connected to the need and call for a feminist theory of female delinquency since 'a feminist approach to delinquency would construct explanations of female behaviour that are sensitive to its patriarchal context and would also examine ways in which agencies of social control -the police, the courts, and the prisons - act to reinforce women's place in male society.'⁴⁷

James Messerschmidt added the feminist notion of patriarchy to a Marxist reading of crime. Female crime, as well as violent lower-class crime, was seen as a consequence of their powerlessness and violent male crime against women as a result of male dominion.⁴⁸

The heuristic tools of patriarchy theory have been profitably used in studies on juvenile female delinquency by analysing the structure of the patriarchal family in which women are under very strict control.⁴⁹ In this regard, patriarchy theory is closely linked with the

⁴⁵The literature on patriarchy is vast, Sylvia Walby, 'Theorising Patriarchy', *Sociology*, 23, 2, 1989, pp. 213-34.

⁴⁶Meda Chesney-Lind, 'Women and Crime: the Female Offender', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol.12, 1, 1986, p. 78.

⁴⁷ This discourse was related particularly to girls delinquency, Meda Chesney-Lind, 'Girls, Delinquency, and Juvenile Justice: Toward a Feminist Theory of Young Women's Crime', in Raffel Price and Sokoloff, *The Criminal Justice*, p. 81.

⁴⁸Messerschmidt James, *Capitalism, Patriarchy and Crime: Toward a Socialist Feminist Criminology*, Rowman and Littlefield, Totowa, 1986.

⁴⁹Meda Chesney-Lind, " 'Girls' Crime and Woman's Place: Toward a Feminist Model of Female Delinquency", *Crime and Delinquency*, 35, 1989; Merry Morash and Meda Chesney-Lind, 'A Reformulation and Partial Test of the Power Control Theory of Delinquency', *Justice Quarterly*, 8, 1991; Simon Singer and Murray Levine, 'Power Control Theory, Gender and Delinquency: a Partial Replication with Additional Evidence on the Effects of Peers', *Criminology*, 26, 1988.

next theory treated, social control theory.⁵⁰ Its main representative, Frances Heidensohn, holds that the shift in attention toward social control has to be undertaken outside disciplinary boundaries. This perspective attempted to include all themes regarding women and crime. As anticipated in the second part of this chapter, this theory maintained that the failure of social bonding processes led to criminality. Women have historically experienced more control, exercised both by men and women themselves. For this reason women have been more likely to avoid crime.⁵¹ Women have been compelled to behave consistently with what society considers proper female behaviour lest they encounter social condemnation. As Heidensohn explained: '(...) women were subject to a series of pressures and rewards to conform to which men were not. Informal sanctions discourage women and girls from straying far from proper behaviour: parents will disapprove or impose sanctions, as will gossip, ill-repute, and male companions.'⁵² There is no doubt that 'Fear of crime, harassment, and stigma all aid this process. A range of other commitments - to children, family, community, etc.- occupies women much more fully than they do men. Finally, public images and culture encourage daring deviance in men, but suggest that deviant women are punished.'⁵³

Furthermore, this theory encourages examining how women, as mothers, have the power to reproduce conformity in successive generations of women.⁵⁴ This is particularly relevant to this study since women in mafia families have been those who transmit male mafia values to their daughters. This will be explored in further detail in chapter four.

The oldest hypothesis for explaining increases in female crime was female emancipation.⁵⁵ The publication of the book by Fedra Adler and Rita Simon⁵⁶ contributed to strengthening the emancipation theory and was followed greatly by other scholars.⁵⁷ Adler

⁵⁰For a clear synthetic explanation of this theory, Tamar Pitch, 'Le differenze di genere', in Marzio Barbagli, Umberto Gatti (a c. di), *La criminalità in Italia*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2002, pp. 178-18.

⁵¹J. Hagan, J.H. Simpson, and A.R. Sillis, 'The Sexual stratification of Social Control: A Gender-Based Perspective on Crime and Delinquency', *British Journal of Sociology*, 30, 1979, p.25.

⁵²Maguire, Morgan, Reiner, *The Oxford Handbook*, p. 788.

⁵³*ibid.*, pp. 788-789.

⁵⁴Bridget Hutter and Gillian Williams, *Controlling Women: the Normal and the Deviant*, Croom Helm, London, 1981.

⁵⁵For the history of this approach, Smart, *Women, Crime and Criminology*, pp. 70-76.

⁵⁶Fedra Adler, *Sisters in Crime: The Rise of the New Female Criminal*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1975; Rita Simon, *Women and Crime*, Lexington, London, 1975.

⁵⁷Richard Deming, *Women: The New Criminals*, Dell Publishing Co, New York, 1977; Freda Adler and Rita Simon, *The Criminology of Deviant Women*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1979; George W. Noblit and Janie M. Burcart, 'Women and Crime: 1960-1970', *Social Science Quarterly*, 56, 4, 1976, pp. 650-661; Roy L. Austin, 'Women's Liberation and Increases in Minor, Major and Occupational Crimes', *Criminology*, 20, 3-4, 1982, pp. 407-30; Steven Box, *Power, Crime and Mystification*, Tavistock, London, 1981; Steven Box and

maintained that the number of delinquent women had risen since the 1970s because of women's liberation. As women reached an equal degree of opportunity in legitimate fields such as education, occupation, family, politics, and the military, so did they also in illegal activities. In other words, women found places in traditionally male-dominated activities that included crime. Adler grounded her thesis in empirical sources, including both female and male arrest data. By noticing the increase in female crime was faster than in male crime, she concluded that the gap between male and female crime was shrinking. Some feminists criticized Adler's thesis on the basis that blaming female liberation for the increase in female criminality risked condemning the emancipation movement.⁵⁸ Darren Steffensmeier argued that an increase in female crime had occurred before the women's liberation movement and its effects in the legitimate world. Steffensmeier thinks that at most it might be maintained that, 'The movement appears to have had a greater impact on changing the image of the female offender than on changing the level or types of criminal behaviour that she is likely to commit.'⁵⁹ Moreover, even though the increase in female crime was more rapid than in male crime, the gap between male and female offenders still remained great.⁶⁰ Other scholars argued that the only negative consequence of the women's emancipation movement was that society and criminal justice systems had begun to consider women as capable of committing crimes.⁶¹

Rita Simon supported the emancipatory theory in relation to the increase in property crimes by women. This was a consequence of changing female status, including an increase in labour-force participation, education, professions and income. Most contradicted this theory by underlining that the kind of property crimes in which women were becoming more involved were committed by women who had not participated in the

C. Hale, 'Liberation and Female Criminality in England and in Wales', *British Journal of Criminology*, vol. 23 (1), 1983.

⁵⁸Leonard, *Women, Crime*; Smart, *Women, Crime and Criminology*; Lee H Bowker, *Women, Crime, and the Criminal Justice System*, Heath, Lexington, 1976; Clarice Feinman, *Women in the Criminal Justice System*, Praeger, London, 1994 (3rd ed.); Naffine, *Female Crime*; Morris, *Women, Crime*; Richey Mann Coramae, *Female Crime and Delinquency*, University of Alabama Press, Alabama, 1984; Jo Ann Gora, *The New Female Criminal: Empirical Reality or Social Myth*, Praeger, New York, 1982; Darrel J Steffensmeier, 'Sex Differences in Patterns of Adult Crime, 1965-1977', *Social Forces*, 58, 4, 1980, pp. 1080-1109.

⁵⁹ Darren Steffensmeier, 'Trends in Female Criminality: Is Crime still a Man's World?', in Raffel Price and Sokoloff, *The Criminal Justice*, p. 100.

⁶⁰ Darren Steffensmeier and Cathy Streifel, 'Trends in Female Crime, 1960-1990', in Culliver, *Female Criminality*.

⁶¹Daniel J Curran, 'The Myth of the New Female Delinquent', *Crime and Delinquency*, 30, 3, 1984, pp. 386-399. Morris, *Women, Crime*.

liberation process, but were a result of the increasing 'feminisation of poverty'.⁶² Simon's thesis might be valid only for explaining the increase in white-collar crime, a typical offence deriving from new occupational opportunities. Women involved in property crime were mainly poor and young. They were not women who had lived through the effects of the liberation movement.

The close relation between women and poverty is at the core of the marginalization theory, which states that increases in female crime have been reported in offences such as shoplifting which are usually related to poor people. Therefore attention must be shifted from female emancipation to female marginalisation, since women are usually poorer than men because they are more likely to be victims of the modern recession.⁶³ Although theorists from this school did not focus on poverty as the only cause of criminality, they did consider it the most important clue to understanding female crime. Jane Roberts Chapman emphasizes that poverty and criminality are a problem for many single mothers who make up a growing proportion of the poor.⁶⁴

This thesis reads the increase in the number of women charged with mafia and mafia related crime both through the emancipation theory and the marginalisation theory. The increasing participation of women belonging to mafia families in the activities of the criminal organisation were influenced by changes in women's position in Italian society. Whereas the use of women external to the mafia in criminal jobs at the lower ranks of the organisation might be interpreted as the result of female poverty.

In the next chapter we will describe transformations of women's condition in contemporary Italy, which undoubtedly were at the core of the modification that occurred in the roles of women in the mafia.

⁶²Darrell Steffensmeier and Emilie A. Allan, 'Sex Disparities in Arrests by Residence, Race, and Age: An Assessment of the Gender Convergence/Crime Hypothesis', *Justice Quarterly*, 5, 1988, pp. 53-80.

⁶³J. Millar and C. Glendinning, 'Gender and Poverty', *Journal of Social Policy*, 18, 3, 1989, pp. 363-383.

⁶⁴This is also evident by looking at the results of Jurik's empirical study, N. Jurik, 'The Economics of Female Recidivism', *Criminology*, 21, 4, 1983, pp. 3-12. Jane Roberts Chapman, *Economic Realities and the Female Offender*, Lexington Books, Lexington, 1980. Monica Platek, 'What It's like For Women: Criminology in Poland and Eastern Europe', in Nicole Rafter and Frances Heidensohn, *Criminology: The Transformation of a Social Science*, Open University Press, Buckingham, 1995; Pat Carlen, *Criminal Women*, Polity Press, Oxford, 1985; Pat Carlen., *Women, Crime and Poverty*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1988

CHAPTER TWO

The History of Italian Women Since 1945: Labour Market and Social Customs

Introduction

The evolution of the role of women in the mafia cannot be understood without taking into consideration the bigger picture of general changes in conditions for women that have occurred in Italy since the Second World War. Therefore this chapter is intended to give the reader a synthesis of the history of Italian women in terms of the labour market and social customs. This will be done by dealing only marginally with the political context of Italian society and diversities among women in terms of region, class, age and education.¹ Given the short space available, the account is chronological and the narrative unable to represent the complexity and contradictions implicit in any social transformation.

2.1. Women and the labour market

This section looks at the development of female participation in the labour market by focussing on those characteristics of female employment that will allow us to draw a parallel between the legitimate world and the mafia system in terms of the use of female labour. For the sake of brevity, women's battles for labour rights, important though they have been, will not be considered here.²

According to a number of economists, the female presence in the workplace increased during the Second World War and went through a phase of decline from 1945 until the late 1960s. A new period of growth has occurred since the 1970s.³ For the sake of exposition, we will follow this chronology.

¹For a synthetic Italian social history, Jonathan Dunnage, *Twentieth Century Italy*, Longman, London, 2002. For a more detailed one, Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, Penguin, London, 1990.

²For legislation on women and work, Lesley Caldwell, *Italian Family Matters. Women, Politics and Legal Reform*, Macmillan, London, 1991, pp.102-119.

³Flavia Pristinger, 'Il lavoro delle donne: passato e presente', in Ulivieri, *Educazione e ruolo*, p. 144. Francesca Bettio, *The Sexual Division of Labour. The Italian Case*, Clarendon, Oxford, 1988, pp.48-49.

2.1.1 From 1945 to the 1960s: the decline

Like women in many countries, Italian women during the Second World War were recruited to do the male combatants' former jobs. The number of employed women decreased in the aftermath of the war.⁴ Among the causes for this decrease was the return from the front of men who claimed back their jobs. In other words, during the difficult years after the war, men's and women's interests clashed due to the shrinking labour market.⁵ As a result, most women were expelled from the labour market and confined to the domestic sphere. This reinforcement of the sexual division of labour was supposed to help families cope with post-war economic shortages. As Flavia Pristinger writes: 'during years when the wage income of many Italian families failed to cover basic necessities, female labour was expended mainly within the household to sustain the family; women applied their industriousness and intelligence in a variety of ways, as they have always done when faced with situations of shortage.'⁶

The war spurred the growth of women's awareness despite their subsequent expulsion from the public domain. Indeed, women had demonstrated their ability to do certain traditionally male jobs, refuting popular notions that men were better able to do them. Through their involvement in traditionally male fields, women had to some extent revealed that their previous exclusion was mere gender discrimination, usually justified on the basis of supposed physical and psychological inability. In addition, women who fought in the Resistance experienced historically new responsibilities and freedom, thus becoming an important model of emancipation for women of the next generation.⁷ The compensation given to women for their fundamental contribution to the nation's liberation from Nazi occupation was the right to vote. This in itself was of course insufficient to improve women's position in society. In fact, as noted previously, their presence in the labour market started to decline. On paper, the Constituent Assembly, elected in 1946, enacted an article stating, 'the working woman must have all the rights that the working man has and equal wage for equal work.'⁸ In practical terms women would have to fight long battles to achieve real implementation of those rights.

⁴Gloria Chianese, *Storia sociale della donna in Italia (1800-1890)*, Guida, Napoli, 1980, p.51.

⁵*ibid.*, p. 95.

⁶Pristinger, 'Il lavoro delle donne', in Ulivieri, *Educazione e ruolo*, p. 147.

⁷Chianese, *Storia sociale*, p.51.

⁸Anna Garofalo, *L'Italiana in Italia*, Laterza, Bari, 1956, p. 47. For article 37 see Caldwell, *Italian Family*, p.65.

The mobilization of women during the war and their dismissal thereafter showed that the female presence in the labour market was permitted and accepted as long as it was needed. As Francesca Bettio put it: 'The role of women in the labour market was traditionally conceived of as a labour reserve, as easy to mobilise as to dismiss.'⁹ It should be stressed there was a constant pattern of using the female labour force as a reserve in the labour market. As we will see in the following chapters, this has also been the case with the mafia. Both in the legitimate world and the mafia system 'women were treated as pawns to be sacrificed in time of crisis.'¹⁰ Women, like immigrants, 'served and hampered the economy. Recruited when labour was in short supply, they were dismissed when the job market shrank.'¹¹

Throughout the 1950s, the exclusion of women from the labour force was endorsed by intense political propaganda grounded on the negative image of working women and the positive one of mother and wife. The ideological alibi that only certain jobs were suitable for women helped to support the sexual division of labour and at the same time to disguise the underlying female subordination.

Between the 1950s and the mid-1960s, Italy shifted from being based prevalently on the agricultural sector to one of the most industrialized countries in the West. The period of economic growth between 1958 and 1963 became known as the 'economic miracle.' However, this sudden boom did not last since it stemmed from two unstructured factors – cheap labour and low technological investment. These made Italy competitive until Third World countries entered the market by offering greater availability of the same factors. And so the Italian economy moved from boom to bust in the mid-1960s. The solutions undertaken to tackle this critical economic moment were the restructuring of the factory system and concentration on high quality and fashion goods. Such solutions had devastating effects on female employment because they transformed the expulsion of female workers, whose numbers had increased during the euphoric growth of the economic miracle, into marginalization.¹² The relation between expulsion and marginalization is evident; the expelled labour force was reutilised externally within the same productive process but in a marginalized form, i.e. in black labour ('under the counter'). The so called

⁹Bettio, *The Sexual Division*, p.50.

¹⁰Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot, *A History of Women in the West. Toward a Cultural Identity of Women in the Twentieth Century*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, London, 1993.

¹¹*ibid.*, p.465.

¹²Pristinger, 'Il lavoro delle donne', in Olivieri, *Educazione e ruolo*, p. 148; Caldwell, *Italian Family*, p.116.

ristrutturazione between 1963 and 1968 implied new rhythms of work, based on overtime and premiums, and the decentralization of production with a distribution of labour outside the factory.¹³ As a consequence of the first implication, industries looked for a physically strong working-class and thus women, along with old people, became the '*quote deboli*' ('weak part') of the supply.¹⁴ Indeed, within the overall decline in employment, the number of employed men increased and those of women decreased.¹⁵ In other words, male workers replaced female ones in order to accelerate production.

The second implication, i.e. the decentralization of production, entailed external work which involved more women than men. Shut out of the official market, women were employed externally without any sort of regulation. This type of employment took on different forms such as domestic labour and temporary or part-time work.¹⁶ For example, domestic labour, which reduced the expenditure of industry due to low wages and high flexibility, was above all a female activity that often used the free collaboration of other family members. As a consequence, there was an unavoidable correspondence between work and family activities.¹⁷ Parallels with the mafia can be traced in this respect since, as will be explored in the following chapters, most of the work carried out by mafia women in the drug trade occurred in the household. The management of illegal activities by mafia families, particularly in some stages of the drug trade, might be defined as a form of domestic labour.

To sum up, the crisis of the mid to late-1960s led to the expulsion of women from the official labour market due to the reorganisation of work within industries and the decentralization of production. As a consequence, women were employed by small factories. This type of employment was a form of segregation. In Flavia Pristinger's words: 'The massive use of female labour by small factories could be considered a peculiar form of female job segregation. It is an evident system of sexual allocation of labour that "favours" characteristics and work methods "typical" of women (i.e. availability for temporary employment, short hours and low wages), which are in reality conditioned by

¹³*ibid.*, p.72.

¹⁴Manuela Frari (a cura di), *Sociologia della famiglia, sull'emancipazione*, Gulliver, Venezia, 1979, p.70. A. Victoria Goddard, *Gender, Family and Work in Naples*, Berg, Oxford, 1996, pp. 10-11.

¹⁵Frari, *Sociologia*, p. 70.

¹⁶Donald Sassoon, *Contemporary Italy*, Longman, London, 1997, p. 65. Goddard, *Gender, Family*, p.13.

¹⁷Pristinger, 'Il lavoro delle donne', in Ulivieri, *Educazione e ruolo*, p.149.

family life.’¹⁸Such use of female labour marked the beginning of a hidden but significant situation that has characterized female labour to this day.

Women’s difficulties entering and staying inside the official labour market were determined by more than just the above-mentioned economic factors. Cultural elements, such as the widespread negative concept of female work, also affected women’s participation. As Pristinger clearly explains: ‘The concept of female labour in our society, which considers women’s work as secondary to that of men, reflects the idea of a labour force conceived as makeshift activity, unskilled and risky. The notion became widespread that considers the supply of female labour as constantly supplementary, to be used in case of need, but otherwise something that could easily be done without.’¹⁹In Southern regions of Italy having a working woman in the family was considered shameful since women were not controlled when outside for work and it publicly revealed the family’s need for female wages. That is why, as Maria Cutrufelli observed, domestic labour was an ideal solution because it allowed families to both control women and at the same time satisfy the necessity of hiding female labour.²⁰Similarly, male underestimation of female labour has been at the core of the formal exclusion of women from the mafia. *Pentito* Vittorio Foschini told me that if men used their women in male tasks it meant their mafia clan was weak. He maintained women were the ‘weaker sex’ and as such must be protected and not work.²¹Later on we shall amply discuss this question.

The 1960s were years of massive urbanisation; workers moved from the countryside to the city in order to find a job in the industrial sector. In most cases, their wives, once engaged in activities linked to the countryside, ended up being housewives in the city. As argued in the following section, relegating women to the house was complementary to the progress of Italian society towards a model of mass consumption.²²In terms of the labour market, the increase in the number of women as housewives implied a decrease in female involvement in the productive sphere. However, scholars caution us not to believe the figures that emerged from the official data of the 1960s, which stated women were either employed in the official labour market or happy housewives.²³The reality was much more complex since, as already shown, women were likely to be employed in the hidden and

¹⁸*ibid.*, p. 151.

¹⁹*ibid.*, p. 75.

²⁰Maria Cutrufelli, *Disoccupata con onore. Lavoro e condizione della donna*, Mazzotta, Milano, 1975, p. 64.

²¹Interview with Vittorio Foschini, Modena, 4 May 2004.

²²Pristinger, ‘Il lavoro delle donne’, in Ulivieri, *Educazione e ruolo*, p.149.

²³*ibid.*, p. 153.

informal sector. In studying the female labour force, it is fundamental to take into account the existence of this hidden reality, which made official figures misleading.²⁴ Hidden features have marked women's history in almost all fields. For instance, as mentioned above and explained later, the presence of women in the mafia has been a masked reality and as such unlikely to be captured by official data.

Characteristics peculiar to female labour (including marginalization, segregation and exploitation) analysed so far have not been contingent on any specific given context. Yet, they must be considered as the most significant hallmark of female participation in the labour market, as well as in mafia activities.

2.1.2 From the 1970s to the 1990s: the rise

From 1972 to 1989 the number of employed women increased from 27.4 % to 34%. Post-industrial society facilitated women's access to the labour market. The growth of the service sector and development of automation and computers were both crucial to this. These transformations, marking post-industrial society, created new spaces of activity and job opportunities for women. Since the 1970s, the rise of female employment in all European countries has been proportional to the expansion of the service sector; women were over-represented 'especially in retail sales, banking, and public and private services, whereas they were a minority in manufacturing, mining, construction, public works, and transportation.'²⁵ On paper, the tertiary sector allowed women to reconcile their roles as mothers, wives and workers since many occupations in the tertiary sector offered the opportunity, in terms of schedules and flexibility, to dedicate time to child rearing and management of the household. Moreover, technological development affected the distribution of jobs between sexes. On the one hand, it reduced the importance of physical strength in the workplace and, on the other, facilitated domestic work. This argument is also valid in explaining the increase in women's participation in mafia activities, in part caused by the financial modernisation of the mafia that had occurred since the 1980s. In chapter five we will see that new financial tasks opened up job opportunities for women within the mafia since they were removed from most of the violent work of the underworld, which, for physical and cultural reasons, women were not as well-equipped for as men.

²⁴*ibid.*, p. 150.

²⁵Duby and Perrot, *A History of Women*, p. 473.

Two more factors have contributed to the increase in women's presence in the labour market since the 1970s: the rise in female education and decrease in birth rate. The latter reflects the greater number of women employed in the public sphere and smaller number of women devoted to the home.

Previously, women could be kept outside the labour market partly because of the increase in male wages that made female wages unnecessary. Since the late 1960s, however, fewer family members meant families were deprived of earnings thus prompting the need for female wages. This was particularly true with the arrival of the consumer society where buying consumer goods became indispensable. At the same time, society also expected women to fulfil their traditional role in the household, a role that became even more demanding with the development of the mass consumption society.²⁶ Despite the increase of convenience in the household, domestic tasks were not reduced due to two interrelated reasons. The Italian welfare state did not offer solid support in terms of social services. Concurrently, Italian society continued giving great importance to the role of mother and wife, while underestimating that of the working woman. In other words, women were neither aided with material support nor facilitated from an ideological point of view. As a result, women experienced conflicting trends: not only were they required for the labour market, they were also reclaimed for the household without any aid. Interestingly Donald Sassoon has noted that even in rare cases where the welfare state has worked, women still had to deal with bureaucratic procedures, compelling them to perform 'the function of unpaid agents of the welfare state.'²⁷ Hence, it is easily understandable that most women looked for more flexible jobs that enabled them to simultaneously fulfil their role as mother. So they were likely to be employed in temporary jobs, which implied low wages and no guaranteed legal protection. Many occupations in the tertiary sector offered these related opportunities and disadvantages. 'Studies of women's employment in various categories of the service sector found that they tended to be concentrated in the lower-paid or less secure jobs.'²⁸ That is often why 'women tended to seek jobs in the public sector, as they offered some guarantees including pension, paid maternity leave, acceptable work hours, etc.'²⁹ In Southern Italy the situation was worse than in other regions because the

²⁶Pristinger, 'Il lavoro delle donne', in Ulivieri, *Educazione e ruolo*, p.1.

²⁷Sassoon, *Contemporary Italy*, p.109.

²⁸*ibid.*, p.110.

²⁹*ibid.*, pp.110-111.

tendency for women to be excluded from the official market and employed in 'black labour' was particularly pronounced.³⁰

Since the 1970s, the rise in education has enabled women to be employed in better paying professional jobs. However, they were likely to remain at the bottom of the profession.³¹ Even in cases where women achieved leading positions, they were confined to special activities and still received lower wages than men. As Rose Marie Lagrave observed: 'Although the number of female executives, managers, and engineers has been on the rise in many places from Scandinavia to Spain, women in these positions are still far outnumbered by men. The small number of women in middle-management positions explains their virtual absence from the ranks of top executives, since they are not in positions from which they can be promoted.'³² Furthermore, even when women entered traditionally male jobs, they were mostly confined to those fields related to tasks conventionally considered belonging to women. Indeed, 'women tend to concentrate in certain specialities; women doctors tend to specialize in paediatrics, maternity, mental illness, hygiene and prevention –all less remunerative than surgery. Women lawyers are attracted to family law not company law. Women entrepreneurs tend to be concentrated in the clothing industry not in machine tools.'³³ It is not unimportant to remember the close relationship existing between gender education and types of jobs.³⁴ This situation was affected by gender differential education and social expectations: 'If education encouraged women to seek work, it also steered them toward already feminised sectors of the economy, which consequently became even more feminised.'³⁵

Over the last two decades women have sought to reconcile their presence in the labour market with that in the household. The term *doppia presenza* (dual role) defines the hallmark of women's identity in post-modern society.³⁶ However, the dual role is a difficult model to achieve. Women manage to fill this role only when they can afford to employ outside help or have a supportive family network. Only these circumstances leave women free to work since they provide help in managing the home and childrearing.³⁷ This is because in Italy female participation in the workplace has not been balanced by

³⁰Cutrufelli, *Disoccupata con onore*, p. 88.

³¹Dunnage, *Twentieth Century*, p. 203.

³²Duby and Perrot, *A History of Women*, p. 473.

³³Sassoon, *Contemporary Italy*, p. 112.

³⁴Ulivieri, *Educazione e ruolo*, p. 3.

³⁵Duby and Perrot, *A History of Women*, p. 468.

³⁶Laura Balbo, 'La doppia presenza', *Inchiesta*, 32, 1978.

³⁷Pristinger, 'Il lavoro delle donne', in Ulivieri, *Educazione e ruolo*, p. 160.

improvements in social services or the organisation of work in terms of scheduling.³⁸ Moreover, the parallel presence of men in the household has still remained minor.³⁹ The result of this kind of situation is that often women have to choose between a job and family.

Let me conclude this section by quoting Pristinger who observed that the shift from the model characterizing the 1960s and 1970s – marginalization - to the one that marked the 1980s and 1990s – dual roles - has been partial and incomplete.

The passage from marginality to the dual role should nevertheless not be read as definitively overcoming the past, as the smooth progress of modernisation, destined to absorb and cancel traditional features and contexts of female labour. Structural factors and restraints – both from the family and the market -, perhaps even subjective, seem favourable toward the continued existence of a complex and differentiated working reality for women, irreducible to an unique homogenous model.⁴⁰

2.2. *Women and social customs*

This section looks at the impact of modernization on gender relations within Italian society since 1945. The focus will be on legislation and social expectations in relation to the private sphere and sexual mores. The reciprocity between the legislative and social levels often makes it difficult to discern which one determines the other. This is particularly true in the case of issues concerning the private sphere. As Shur put it: 'Analysis and reforms of laws relating to sex and marriage may be viewed, (...) both as a means of keeping the statute books up to date and as a way of promoting attitudes and patterns of behaviour believed to be rational and socially desirable.' Legislation as well as social perceptions will be considered here for the reason that women's goals in terms of law have not been sufficient to guarantee them individual freedom. However, at the same time, changes in women's rights led to transforming moral opinions of women, '(...) allowing women to consider that taking care of themselves before others is a proper attitude.'⁴¹

³⁸*ibid.*, p. 159.

³⁹*ibid.*, p. 158.

⁴⁰*ibid.*, pp. 144-145.

⁴¹Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Harvard University Press, London, 1993.

As already mentioned, the reader will not be provided with an account of the historical and political context of Italian society.⁴² However, it is important to know that the Catholic Church has constantly influenced the course of Italian society towards modernity, particularly in relation to the private sphere.⁴³ What is more, Catholic conservative principles were supported by the policies of the leading party in the First Republic, the Christian Democrats. Even the Communist party showed caution toward questions regarding morality and sexuality.⁴⁴ Its concern in the women's question was confined mostly to matters related to the workplace. Italian society, however, produced a powerful feminist movement, which, although remaining outside its institutions,⁴⁵ was able to achieve fundamental goals and thus counterbalance the influence of the Catholic Church on Italian society.⁴⁶

Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that the modernisation of Italian society has been fast and uneven.⁴⁷ This discontinuous process had an effect on the development of women's conditions, in the sense that the latter has progressed by assuming modern aspects while maintaining traditional ones.⁴⁸

The first part of this section concerns the confusion in gender relations in the aftermath of the Second World War and the subsequent repressive climate of the 1950s. The second looks at Italy's transformation into a society of mass consumption and its impact on women's status during the 1960s. The third treats women's achievements in the 1970s in terms of legislation concerning divorce, family law and abortion. The last part looks at the last twenty years during which the so-called 'dual role'- defining women's identity in a pluralist society - has remained an almost impossible challenge.

⁴²For a clear explanation of the cultural context of Italy see the collection edited by David Forgacs and Robert Lumley, *Italian Cultural Studies: an Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996.

⁴³Caldwell, *Italian Family*, p. 8

⁴⁴See *ibid.*

⁴⁵Non-institutional involvement characterised Italian feminism, Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp (eds.), *Italian Feminist Thought*, Basil Blackwell, London, 1991, p.2.

⁴⁶Ada Trasferri (edited by), *Donna. Women in Italian culture*, Dovehouse Edition, Ottawa Canada, 1989, p. 23.

⁴⁷Franco Combi, 'La scoperta del genere. Società italiana, cultura pedagogica e questione femminile, in Ulivieri, *Educazione e ruolo*, pp. 31-63.

⁴⁸This is clear by confronting generations of women. Franca Bimbi, 'Tre generazioni di donne. Le trasformazioni dei modelli di identità femminile in Italia', in Ulivieri, *Educazione e ruolo*, pp. 70-71.

2.2.1. *The aftermath of the Second World War and the Fifties: confusion and repression in gender relations*

In the aftermath of the Second World War, gender relations were in turmoil due to the return of men from the front. During male absence women had also taken on the role of fathers thereby challenging the traditional father's authority.⁴⁹ Confusion in gender relations are witnessed in the letters collected by Anna Garofalo, who in the late 1940s ran a radio program called *Parole di donne* (Women's Words). These letters by many women of various ages and social backgrounds were made into a book and published in the early 1950s.⁵⁰ This book is a valuable source, in so far as it recounts the common feelings of the generation of women in the late 1940s. Obviously these letters cannot be representative of the generation of women of the late 1940s however they give us a glimpse of a general mood.

Generally speaking, after a period of great participation in the public sphere, the return to the private sphere created frustration since it was perceived as unfair and even paradoxical considering the war had weakened the myth of masculinity. As Garofalo metaphorically wrote: 'The effects of war are reflected even in human relationships and love; and so the myth of male infallibility collapsed along with bridges and houses.'⁵¹ As we have already noted in the first section, the right to vote did not bring about any improvements in the conditions of women. The letters sent to Garofalo showed that women were glad to vote but, being politically unaware, needed men's help in order to make their political choices. Garofalo believed that:

We are sure that, at least in the beginning, women will not take advantage of their new position, since they will be incredulous about their rights, lacking in self-confidence and unaccustomed to choices or decisions apart from those related to the domestic sphere. The structure of traditional society and limits of antiquated obedience will weigh them down until only time and accepted responsibilities free them.⁵²

A sort of disappointment regarding the hopes raised by the Second World War emerged from Garofalo's letters: 'I am afraid that during the fight for liberation and the return of democracy, we were under the illusion we could also establish more modern customs in

⁴⁹Garofalo, *L'Italiana*, p. 65.

⁵⁰*ibid.*, p. 69.

⁵¹*ibid.*, p. 71.

⁵²*ibid.*, p. 45.

our country and bring the progress of law into the fields of individual morality, and relationships within the family and between the sexes.’⁵³

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, legislation failed to meet individual expectations. Civil rights and the new needs of women were not included in the political agenda. The State and Church did not acknowledge social changes in customs and mores; on the contrary, they dragged society back to the pre-war period.⁵⁴ Relentless propaganda glorified the sexual division of labour and suffocated the seeds of a modern identity for women.⁵⁵ Central to this campaign was the exaltation of virginity. The condition of virginity was considered a woman’s most important value since it attributed her with a social identity, insofar as it permitted her to achieve the status of wife and consequently of mother. The everlasting cult of Mary, virgin and mother at the same time, and the revival of the hagiographic myth of Maria Goretti were essential to this propaganda.⁵⁶

The above mentioned pressure on women towards a patriarchal system did not interrupt the development of female consciousness toward liberation.⁵⁷ Indeed, a ‘silent revolution’ occurred in the fifties, paving the way for the student demonstrations and feminist movements of the late 1960s. Gabriella Parca’s book *Le italiane si confessano* (*Italian Women Confess*), a collection of letters sent to women’s magazines by women from various backgrounds, showed examples of women challenging the moral behaviour expected by society in the 1950s.⁵⁸ Many letters were confessions of premarital sexual experiences, which led them to feel guilty because they ran against the Catholic precepts permeating Italian society. As Parca observed: “the deep contradiction between the morality of the environment and its practices emerges from the ease with which, despite the fear, she gives up this ‘valuable good’ (virginity)”.⁵⁹

Undoubtedly, the dichotomy between social expectations and individual desires in relation to sexual issues caused frustration and confusion. However, ‘subordination for

⁵³*ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵⁴For a detailed description of Church and State’s attitude, Caldwell, *Italian Family*, and also Dunnage, *Twentieth Century*, p. 160.

⁵⁵For the role of television in this propaganda, Dunnage, *Twentieth Century*, p.167.

⁵⁶Chianese, *Storia sociale*, p. 69 and p. 197. Bravo, Pelaja, Pescarolo, Scaraffia, *Storia sociale*, p.69. Maria Goretti’s story took place in the early XX th century. She was a twelve year old girl when refused to submit to an attack on her verginity by Alessandro Serenelli. During the attack she shouted: ‘No, it’s a sin. I will not do it.’ So Alessandro stabbed her; she died after few days. Maria forgave him and she was sanctified in 1947.

⁵⁷For a synthetic analysis of women in the 1950s, Chianese, *Storia sociale*, p. 71 and, Caldwell, *Italian Family*.

⁵⁸Gabriella Parca, *Le italiane si confessano*, Series Area, Firenze, 1959.

⁵⁹*ibid.*, p. 65.

matrimonial ends continues to be the only means for giving her own availability recognition and citizenship.’⁶⁰

2.2.2. *The Sixties: from superficial changes to female awareness*

Between the 1950s and late 1960s, Italian society underwent pivotal changes caused partly by the economic boom that had occurred between 1958 and 1963. Already analysed in the previous section, this economic growth was fast and short thus bringing about ‘a number of grave structural imbalances’.⁶¹ The most dangerous among these was ‘the distortion of consumption patterns.’ According to Ginsborg, in fact, ‘the economic “miracle” served once again to emphasise the importance of the individual family unit within Italian civil society.’⁶² The family reduced its members and became more and more a unit of consumption; as a result, the nuclear family prevailed over the extended one.⁶³ Industrialism, urbanism and secularism influenced family functions whose transformation affected women, performing their social role mostly in the private sphere. Women became the target of the new market connected to the domestic appliance and food industries. The prevailing image of women in the 1960s was as both beautiful housewives and efficient household managers who still were able to care about themselves in terms of aesthetic appearance.⁶⁴ This last aspect assumed an enormous importance inasmuch as it opened up a new field of consumption that included cosmetics, hygiene and clothing.⁶⁵ Changes in consumption related to the body, home and transport also influenced women’s lives. As Luisa Passerini observed: ‘These changes also involved a modification of women’s lifestyles and their self-presentation in everyday life: going out, walking in public, travelling, smoking, and questioning sexual mores though not translating this completely into action.’⁶⁶ Not surprisingly, the number of women’s magazines emphasising consumerism increased.⁶⁷ The female model, presented by the ‘hidden persuaders’ of advertising in the sixties, was one of ‘a household woman committed to managing and

⁶⁰Bravo, Pelaja, Pescarolo, Scaraffia, *Storia sociale*, pp.201-202.

⁶¹Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, p.215.

⁶²*ibid.*, p. 216.

⁶³For statistics of the numbers of components of families, *ibid.*, p. 243 and pp.427-

⁶⁴AA.VV., *Il Novecento delle italiane*, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 2001, p. 233.

⁶⁵Duby and Perrot, *A History of Women*, p.328.

⁶⁶Luisa Passerini, ‘The Women’s Movement in Italy and the Events of 1968’, in Marina Cicioni and Nicole Prunster (eds.), *Vision and Revision, Women in Italian Culture*, Berg Publisher, Oxford, 1993.

⁶⁷Donald Meger, *Sex and Power. The Rise of Women in America, Russia, Sweden and Italy*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, 1983, p.38.

shining her nest'.⁶⁸ At the same time women were supposed to be 'submissive and sweet; the attention women paid to their bodies was also completely aimed at pleasing men, in accordance with a model of beauty which could be neither too provocative nor eccentric but pleasant and reassuring instead.'⁶⁹

There is little doubt that the above changes were more concerned with the body and fashion than civil rights. Bikinis, mini-skirts and new hairstyles marked the modern Italian woman in the early 1960s. However, she was still bound to male power and struggled to enter the labour market. Resistance to traditional patterns of gender relations emerged from a research study on Italian men carried out in 1965 by Gabriella Parca. Her survey, later turned into a book called *I sultani* (The Sultans), showed that 81% of Italian men missed whorehouses and 61% of them wanted to marry a virgin. Most of them also stated that women must be beautiful and tidy, but not intellectual.⁷⁰

Years of contradictions, the early 1960s marked an important moment of transition. Ginsborg observed that:

The Italy of the boom was still a society full of taboos about sexual behaviour. The restrictive code of official morality was deeply intertwined in the South with codes of honour. Sexual mores were to change almost more slowly than anything else in Italy. However, in the early 1960s, there were a few signs of a more open approach. Timid discussions of pre-marital sex appeared in some women's magazines. *Oggi* ran a survey on sex education and the radical weekly *L'Espresso* (founded in 1955) even dared to publish an investigation of infidelity levels amongst Italian wives. (Men's infidelity seems to have been taken for granted.) The first cracks in the official morality had appeared, but it was to be another decade at least before sexual mores underwent any major change.⁷¹

The seeds of the great transformation in terms of sexual attitudes, which would occur in the 1970s, can be located in the years of protest, namely the two-year period between 1968 and 1970. Student movements and working class protests contributed greatly to modifying Italian social customs. Modifications touched the patriarchal system in terms of parental control. Young people could experiment with new freedoms. Furthermore, signs of transformation in gender relations came from the increase in the number of separations in the mid-to-late 1960s; this increase made divorce one of the most important issues debated in Italian society.⁷²

⁶⁸ AA.VV., *Il Novecento delle italiane*, pp.109-110.

⁶⁹ *ibid*, pp.109-110.

⁷⁰ AA.VV., *Il Novecento delle italiane*, p. 253.

⁷¹ Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, p. 244.

⁷² *ibid.*, p.259.

The period of 1968-69 was a turning point in women liberation as well, partly as a result of women's participation in the student movement and the '*autunno caldo*' ('hot autumn') of September and October 1969. These latter political experiences made women more conscious of their rights and the possibility of claiming them. The student movement exploded and questioned those relations grounded on authority in the factory, the school and the family, including gender and parental relationships.⁷³ However, there was evidence that even women in the movement ended up experiencing a sort of sexual division of labour since tasks within their activities were typed by sex.⁷⁴ Once again women were confined to minor activities and excluded from decisional roles that were considered male. Since this discrimination happened within a group who claimed they were attacking the patriarchal system, women became more willing to create feminist groups.⁷⁵

Moreover, female consciousness spread beyond an elite as a result of the creation of mass education.⁷⁶ Many formal and informal barriers to higher education were removed.⁷⁷ As a consequence of higher educational opportunities: 'A new type of woman started coming into being; generally urbane, young, unmarried, and well-educated, for the first time she did not accept the priority of her role as wife and mother. She had her own social and political interests and rebelled against an atavistic destiny of subjugation and exclusion.'⁷⁸

In the late 1960s, the move towards anti-conformist styles and fashions reflected the social transformation taking place; women refused elegant dresses, make-up and high heels and shifted to boots, sandals and trousers.⁷⁹ Sex became a crucial issue as young people claimed more freedom to express their sexuality. Adult society tried to hinder this transformation. To give an example, the movie *Theorema* by director Pier Paolo Pasolini was banned on grounds of sexual obscenity.⁸⁰

In 1966, chemistry created the contraceptive pill, but it could only be prescribed for medical reasons. It was the period Pope Paul VI published his encyclical *Humane Vitae*,

⁷³For a brief description of the students protests see Dunnage, *Twentieth Century*, pp.171-174.

⁷⁴Franco Restaino and Adriana Cavarero, *Le filosofie femministe*, Paravia, Torino, 1999, p. 51.

⁷⁵AA.VV., *Il Novecento delle italiane*, p. 9.

⁷⁶Meger, *Sex and Power*, p. 40. For detailed data on the spread of mass education see Dunnage, *Twentieth Century*, pp.160-161.

⁷⁷AA.VV., *Il Novecento delle italiane*, p. 243.

1. ⁷⁸Chianese, *Storia sociale*, p.123.

⁷⁹AA.VV., *Il Novecento delle italiane*, p. 276.

⁸⁰*ibid.*, p.279.

condemning sexual intercourse not aimed at procreation.⁸¹ For this reason the Church condemned the use of contraception. This meant condemning the instrument that, by stopping women's fear of undesired pregnancy, enabled women to express their sexuality as freely as men.

In conclusion, 1960s Italy seemed to be modern, yet its transformation was partially rooted in society. Traditionalist mentality prevailed. An illuminating example of the difficulty of social progress was the social reaction in 1968 after the elimination of Article 559, which charged women, and not men, with adultery.⁸² According to common belief of that time, the article kept women from cheating on their husbands.⁸³ Therefore, most Italians wanted to keep the article in the legal code even though it legalised a double morality in terms of adultery and discriminated against women. Such a puritanical reaction is good evidence in support of the idea that Italian society was still retrograde at the time in respect to sexual morality.

To conclude these reflections on the Sixties, Italian society showed a modern face embodied by economic growth and the proliferation of consumer goods. Yet, this growth was so rapid it suddenly took possession of a poor population from the austere Fifties. Italian society could not absorb the profound forms of modernity stemming from the society of mass consumption. However, we cannot deny that gender relations started to be challenged in the 1960s. The outcome of this process would occur in the 1970s with changes in legislation and gender identity.

2.2.3. *The Seventies: key developments in women's rights*

Remarkable progress in gender relations and sexual freedom marked the 1970s. During this period 'the bond which tied sexual expression of women to marriage and women's dignity to virginity seemed to collapse.'⁸⁴ Important achievements in terms of legislation (including divorce, family law reform and abortion) affected women's social and individual identities. Broad results of this were seen in the 1980s when, generally speaking, women started refusing to sacrifice themselves for the family and instead found personal fulfilment beyond the social role of wife and mother. In the early 1980s, Gloria Chianese wrote: 'a generation of women existed throughout the Seventies who experimented with

⁸¹*ibid.*, p.281.

⁸²Marina Ingrassi, *Le responsabilità penali nel diritto di famiglia*, Giappichelli, Torino, 2004, p. 16.

⁸³Gabriella Parca, *I sultani, mentalità e comportamento del maschio italiano*, Milano, 1965, pp.5-6.

⁸⁴Bravo, Pelaja, Pescarolo, Scaraffia, *Storia sociale*, p. 75.

conditions of life completely different from the previous generation: the “housewife”, who at the beginning of the 1970s still represented, both practically and symbolically, the prevailing image of women, is now a figure of minor importance among young and adult women under 40.’⁸⁵

In 1974, feminists directed their efforts at keeping the divorce law because Catholics wanted to change it through a popular referendum. This eventually did not modify the divorce bill, which had been fundamental in a country with many cases of polygamy, often caused by emigration. Moreover, it became clear that there was a need to reform family law, which seemed anachronistic and far away from the reality of most Italian families. The new family law finally passed in 1975; it stated that father and mother were equal in terms of duties and rights within the household. No longer paternal control but parental control was the basic principle of the family. The last of the important transformations in legislation from the Seventies occurred in 1978 and was the most important achievement for women in practical and symbolic terms: the legalisation of abortion.⁸⁶ In 1981, Catholics tried to abolish Law 194 through a referendum; however, it was saved also thanks to an incisive feminist campaign.⁸⁷

On a general level as well as in practical terms, the above achievements brought more freedom to the lives of women, especially with respect to self-determination. This meant changes in the way they made fundamental choices regarding their private life. In other words, legal protection allowed an increase in female consciousness when facing crucial life decisions. ‘More liberal attitudes toward contraception and abortion have enabled women to reclaim possession of their bodies and sexuality.’⁸⁸

Another factor that contributed to liberating women, by giving them time and strength to engage in public activities, arose in the 1970s when domestic products became products of mass consumption. Therefore, the opportunity to reduce housework stopped being only a privilege of the upper class. At the same time, the increase in the need for buying domestic appliances made female (...) work necessary outside the home, because many

⁸⁵Chianese, *Storia sociale*, p. 73.

⁸⁶Bono and Kemp, *Italian Feminist*, pp.211-212.

⁸⁷AA.VV, *Il Novecento delle italiane*, p. 377. For details on 194 bill, Pitch, *Un diritto per due*, pp. 63-98. For an updated discussion on abortion, Claudia Mancina, *Oltre il femminismo*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2002, pp. 85-103.

⁸⁸Duby and Perrot, *A History of Women*, p.9.

families now required two incomes in order to afford the new products, equipment, and services that either partially or totally replaced traditional forms of 'housework.'⁸⁹

Two significant indicators of changes in conditions for women started in the 1970s and developed over the following decades: the increase in female education and the fall in the birth rate. These correspond to the decline in married women; indeed marriage rates in the Seventies and Eighties dropped to the lowest levels in Europe. These new trends indicated that women had stopped seeing marriage as the only way to fill a recognised social role.⁹⁰ It is important to remember that these transformations concerned Northern Italy more than Southern Italy, dominated by the patriarchal model.⁹¹ In her research carried out in the 1970s, Maria Cutrufelli showed to what extent sexual subordination of women in Sicily was still a prevalent situation, in terms of women experiencing sexual relationships as power relationships.⁹² The interesting volume edited by Simona Mafai, published in 1975, also showed that Southern women mostly experienced patriarchal relations.⁹³

2.2.4. *The Eighties and Nineties: partial emancipation of women*

Radical transformations in gender relations and women's status have occurred over the last twenty years in all European countries. Technological, economic and demographic innovations were central to these rapid transformations. Significant changes occurred in patterns of reproduction marked by the use of birth control.⁹⁴ However, if we compare Italian women to those from other countries, the fact emerges that they did not experience a clear development of emancipation. This was due to the difficulties encountered in the labour market and limited support from the State in child rearing. Thus 'Italian women, even though they made great strides in the last two decades of the century, remained among those who had least chance to escape from family constrictions into the official

⁸⁹AA.VV., *Il Novecento delle Italiane*, p. 444.

⁹⁰For a brief and clear history of women and marriage, Bravo, Pelaja, Pescarolo, Scaraffia, *Storia sociale*, pp.202-

⁹¹Simonetta Piccone Stella, *Ragazze del Sud*, Editori Riuniti, 1979. Interviews were carried out in 1975 and 1976, p. 37.

⁹²Cutrufelli, *Disoccupata con onore*, p. 74.

⁹³Simona Mafai (a cura di), *Essere donna in Sicilia*, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1976, p.17.

⁹⁴Duby and Perrot, *A History of Women*, p.400.

world of work.’⁹⁵ This was shown by an Eurisko survey carried out in 1986 that ‘confirms a great male liberty and a greater female imprisonment in the domestic sphere.’⁹⁶

These examples of partial progress intertwined with a growth in the economic opportunities available to Italian families. ‘The material culture available to families was far richer than ever before, even if they did not make good use of all possibilities inherent in it, erring instead towards futility, repetition and ostentation.’⁹⁷ Without a doubt, family members had been gradually emancipated, to the extent the patriarchal organisation of the unit had become more and more a rare situation. However, changes in relationships among kin were slow; ‘The balance between “family time” and “individual time” in modern Italy was still weighted in favour of the former. Dependency, control, conformity, were strongly present in household structures.’⁹⁸

Even women’s status and identity showed very contradictory features. These were in part the outcome of the different speed of legislation, social mentality and technological transformation influencing society. For example, though women have gained freedom in terms of movement and partially in terms of social expectations, practically speaking they cannot completely enjoy their freedom because of the threat of male violence. In Italy, the number of rape cases has increased over the last twenty years.⁹⁹ This increase could be motivated in part by a parallel increase in reports and thus a decrease in hidden cases. However, this does not eliminate the essential issue entailing the restriction of women’s freedom of movement because of the lack of progress in male sexual behaviour. What is more, the Italian state was very slow in facing the issues related to violence against women. The social belief that women were somehow guilty of being raped underpinned legislative ineptitude.¹⁰⁰ One clear sign of this tendency was the statement in the sentence for a rape case at the Court of Bolzano in 1981:

According to a widespread idea, an initial act of force carried out by a man does not constitute an actual violent action, given that the woman, particularly one from a low social class and with little education, wants to be conquered even with harsh methods, maybe in order to create for herself a sort of alibi for giving in to men’s desires.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵Paul Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents*, Allen Lane, London, 2001, p.105.

⁹⁶*ibid.*, p.105.

⁹⁷*ibid.*, p. 91.

⁹⁸*ibid.*, p. 92.

⁹⁹Chianese, *Storia sociale*, p. 76.

¹⁰⁰For a discussion on ‘the victim in court’ see the interesting essay, Jennifer Temkin, ‘Women, Rape and Law Reform’, in Evans Mary (edited by), *The Woman Question*, Sage, London, 1994, pp. 277-296.

¹⁰¹AA.VV., *Il Novecento delle italiane*, p.373.

To combat such ideas, women in street demonstrations sang the sarcastic slogan ‘*Scusaci, maschio, di averci stuprate, siamo noi che ti abbiamo provocato*’ (‘Forgive us, men, for raping us, we were the ones who provoked you’). Similarly, there has been an increase in the level of violence against women in the household over the last two decades. Therefore, feminist commitment in the 1980s was directed toward the campaign to change rape laws. The discussion on altering the laws against sexual violence in order to change rape and sexual harassment from crimes against morality to crimes against personal integrity has lasted for years.¹⁰²Regretfully, this modification occurred only in the late 1990s.¹⁰³Concerns with pornography and its consequences increased. Progress in gender relations should have led to an increase in male respect for women’s sexuality and the female body. However, an increase in sexual violence that simulates sexual behaviour suggested by violent pornography has indicated a contrary trend.

We can conclude that the last twenty years have shown an ambiguous situation. The data cited above concerning violence against women, along with media representations of women as mere objects, stands in contrast to the remarkable increase in women entering the educational system as well as in those elected to political office. In relation to the latter, Italy is one of the more advanced countries in Europe.¹⁰⁴The most convincing and clear evidence that Italian women still struggle for equal opportunities is the increasing difficulty for them to integrate reproductive and productive functions. According to several social and cultural indicators, female identity embodied by the ‘dual role’ is more a myth than a reality. As seen in the previous section, the term *doppia presenza* (dual role), conceived by Laura Balbo, was intended to describe the new female identity resulting from women being in the labour market as well as the household.¹⁰⁵It embraces the public and private dimensions without considering them as dichotomies. This would mean eliminating the gap between the two spheres, historically considered separate, containing public and private activities, workplace and household, and the political and personal realms. The consequences in terms of female identity would be overcoming the two extreme images that have labelled women, showing them either as housewives and mothers, devoted to

¹⁰²Bono and Kemp, *Italian Feminist*, p. 212.

¹⁰³For the iter of the law, *ibid*, p. 212.

¹⁰⁴See table 22.7 on the representation of women in politics, 1975-92 in Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism*, Harper Collins, London, 1997, p. 682.

¹⁰⁵Balbo, ‘La doppia presenza’.

child rearing, or workingwomen, possessing male characteristics.¹⁰⁶ Instead of achieving this *doppia presenza* (dual role), women over the last two decades have ended up experiencing 'dual jobs'.¹⁰⁷ As the first section pointed out, this has resulted from a lack of aid to women when they entered the labour market.¹⁰⁸ In Italy, the increase in female employment has not been balanced by a parallel extension of social services¹⁰⁹ and male participation in the domestic realm.¹¹⁰ One of the most striking consequences has been the drop in birth rate, so much so that Italy now has reached the lowest in the world.¹¹¹ As a consequence, the family 'has continued to diminish in size.'¹¹²

Overall, we can state with Paul Ginsborg:

On the one hand there were strong forces pushing towards a European model of modernity, among which were the cultural revolution of the 1960s and the 1970s, leading to greater individual choice, the spread of contraception and legalized abortion, the partial emancipation of women and their entry into the labour market. On the other, tradition weighed heavily in both the public and the private spheres: the felt obligation to have children within marriage, the power of the family as an interregional collective, the state's disinterest, after the unfortunate Fascist experience, in reproduction politics. It was this complex but powerful intertwining of the old and the new in family strategies that gave Italy its unexpected and unwanted global primacy.¹¹³

This model of development leading to an incomplete emancipation of women who 'may still have wanted two children, but the pressures of their lives made such symmetry difficult to obtain,'¹¹⁴ is not only specific to the Italian situation but is common in other Southern European regions. Here the indicators of changes have been: '1. Weakening the figure of the male provider; 2. Improving women's education and their attachment to labour; 3. The gradual inclusion of gender equity principles and expansion of the welfare state; 4'. The relaxation of traditional family hierarchies.'¹¹⁵ At the same time there existed

¹⁰⁶For a reflection on women's identity and dual role, Franca Bimbi, 'Three Generations of Women: Transformations of Female Identity Models in Italy', Cicioni and Nicole Prunster (eds.), *Vision and Revision*, p.79.

¹⁰⁷Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents*, p.71.

¹⁰⁸Chiara Saraceno, 'The Italian Family from the 1960s to the Present, *Modern Italy*, 9, 1, May 2004.

¹⁰⁹Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents*, p. 73.

¹¹⁰For the implication on female identity see Franca Bimbi, 'Tre generazioni di donne. Le trasformazioni dei modelli di identità femminile in Italia', in Olivieri, *Educazione e ruolo*, p.68. For empiric research, M. Balbo, P. May, G. Micheli, *Vincoli e strategie nella vita quotidiana*, Franco Angeli, Milano 1990.

¹¹¹Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents*, p. 69.

¹¹²Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, p.414.

¹¹³*ibid.*, p.74.

¹¹⁴Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents*, p. 71.

¹¹⁵Maria Jose Gonzales, Teresa Jurado, Manuela Naldini, (eds.), *Gender Inequalities in Southern Europe, Women, Work and Welfare in the 1990s*, Frank Cass, London, 2000, pp.11-21.

elements of continuity with the traditional gender order such as: '1. Inflexibility in the male role; 2. Female dependency on incomes from fathers and husbands; 3. Women-unfriendly welfare state; 4. Women's political apathy.'¹¹⁶

The above dual tendencies were particularly noticeable in Southern Italy, as the study by Giovanna Capizzi showed through statistical and qualitative data. From her research, carried out in the early 1990s and focussed on the provinces of Agrigento and Caltanissetta, the endurance of a patriarchal ideology not only emerges clearly but was also perceived by women as right and proper. It is interesting that although the empirical data shows that women were in marginal positions and excluded from decision-making and power roles, the interviews with those women show them as completely self-fulfilled at being overloaded by wage labour and household work, and proud to transmit that model to their daughters.¹¹⁷ Moreover, as Giovanna Fiume stresses, the situation for women in Southern Italy has been worsened by the patronage system. The impact of a corrupt system has particularly penalised women's conditions since they 'face a situation where the services offered by the state' are very much less effective than in Central or Northern Italy.

Money payments to families, (...), are a poor substitute for efficient public transport, proper health care, well-run schools. In the absence of honest or prescient local government, the Southern cities have for the most part become urban jungles, asphyxiated by traffic and dominated by criminal organisations. The families remains a necessary refuge from a hostile environment; the lack of *fede pubblica* (civic trust) continues to bedevil Southern society.¹¹⁸

We must complete the general picture of the last two decades drawn so far by acknowledging some progress in gender relations. These have resulted in a gradual shift toward breaking the boundaries between the two sexes. The deconstruction of the traditional gender system has been advantageous not only to women but to men as well. Indeed, the latter finally have the opportunity to feel emotions and employ behaviour that society has always considered as belonging to women, and leave the model of virility that has been imposed on them.¹¹⁹ The point is that men are finally allowed to show feelings attributed traditionally to femininity without encountering social condemnation.

The present is a delicate juncture in the evolution of gender relations. Thus, it is important to bear in mind what Lucia Scaraffia suggests: 'In narrating this ongoing

¹¹⁶*ibid.*, pp.22-29.

¹¹⁷Giovanna Capizzi, *Essere donna in Sicilia*, Università di Palermo, Palermo, 1996, p. 11.

¹¹⁸Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, p. 417.

¹¹⁹Carla Ravaoli, *Maschio per obbligo*, Milano, Bompiani, 1979.

process, it seems appropriate to try and contrast the prevailing trend that ascribes to women the fast, self-confident step of the winning army, and to men the halted march of those undergoing a crisis deriving from a loss of the power they have enjoyed since time immemorial.¹²⁰

Not only was the transformation described so far a contributory factor in to the shift in women's condition in the mafia, but also is the development of the criminal organisations themselves, including Cosa Nostra and 'Ndrangheta. It is, hence, to the history of the Sicilian Mafia that we must now turn.

¹²⁰Bravo, Pelaja, Pescarolo, Scaraffia, *Storia sociale*, p. 75.

CHAPTER THREE

History of the Italian Mafia

Introduction

This chapter will provide the reader with a short reconstruction of the history of the Sicilian mafia by focussing on pivotal turning points in the growth of women's involvement in mafia activities. Moreover, the selection of facts presented here will enable the reader to understand the stories of women recounted throughout this thesis.

The chapter will begin with a brief outline of what is meant by mafia and the more influential theories on its origins and nature. The second part is concerned with changes that occurred within the mafia between Fascism and the 1950s. Attention is given to Prefect Mori's campaign to stamp out the mafia, how the mafia dealt with the Allied landing in Sicily, the peasant movement, and transformation of the economy based on the *latifondo* (large estate) following agrarian reform in 1950. The third part deals with the development of the mafia in relation to the transformation of Italian society between the late 1950s and early 1970s. As a consequence of the increase in urbanisation and tertiary activities, mafia interests in the 1960s shifted from the countryside to the city. Here, thanks to complicity of the political establishment, mafiosi created a corrupt system based on the building industry. At the same time, the mafia became involved in the drug trade by using traditional routes employed for trafficking tobacco and citrus fruit. As this business developed, the 'first mafia war' erupted among the clans of the organisation. This 'war' alarmed the government, which then set up an anti-mafia parliamentary commission. Finally, the last section of this chapter focuses on the 1970s onwards by illustrating the growth of mafia involvement in drug trafficking, characterised by larger turnover and wider geographic scale, and the consequent modification of its structure. Attention is then directed to the development of the second mafia war, followed by the criminal investigation of the Palermo Court. This culminated in the so-called 'maxi-trial', which ended in convictions confirmed by the Court of Cassation in the early 1990s. The mafia crisis worsened with the end of political protection, one of the outcomes of the turmoil

Italian politics was undergoing due to the investigations known as *Mani Pulite* (Clean hands operation), carried out in Milan by a group of Public Prosecutors. In such critical circumstances, the mafia opted to show its strength by intensifying the strategy of terror against public officials, which it had already displayed in the 1970s and '80s. In 1992, Magistrates Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, who had fought strenuously against the mafia, were assassinated. These tragic events led the Italian government to implement antimafia laws, including harsh countermeasures and a state witness protection program.

As anticipated in the introduction, the historical account presented here relates to the Sicilian mafia, although this study as a whole not only deals with the Sicilian but also the Calabrian mafia. The reader will better understand the long-term development of the Sicilian mafia through a series of specific events, with historical passages that could be related to the 'Ndrangheta as well. Although the two organisations differ in many respects, they share similar roots and underwent similar changes in terms of illegal activities and geographical diffusion. What is more they both proved able to adapt to the modernisation of Italian society. By turning from an agrarian to an urban phase and then by becoming increasingly involved into financial business, they both undertook a physiological transformation parallel to that of Italian society, which has undergone changes in terms of needs, consumptions, and public mentality. What is peculiar to the mafia is the maintenance of certain symbols and codes of behaviour typical of a traditional society. As we shall see, the position of women inside the mafia was affected by the encounter between the modern values of contemporary society and those anachronistic values of the mafia.

3.1. What is the mafia?

According to Article 416 bis of the Italian penal code, a criminal association is defined as a mafia when

(...) those who form part of it make use of an associational tie of intimidating force and methods of subjugation and a conspiracy of silence that derive from them, in order to achieve, either directly or indirectly, management or, in whatever manner, control of economic activities, concessions, authorizations, sub-contracts and public services, so as to realize illicit profits or advantages for themselves or others.¹

In Italy, four criminal organisations of international importance exist, namely the Cosa Nostra, 'Ndrangheta, Camorra and Sacra Corona Unita.² Originating in Southern Italy (respectively Sicily, Calabria, Campania and Apulia), they later spread to Northern Italy as well as abroad. Investigators and public opinion consider the Cosa Nostra the most dangerous and widespread of these criminal organizations. According to the Parliamentary Antimafia Commission:

The mafia association Cosa Nostra (...), has an overriding importance compared to the others through longstanding tradition, an organised force both within and beyond national frontiers, and criminal and financial capacities.... In fact, in relation to other forms of organised crime, it succeeds in fulfilling a general strategic function, imposing its own behavioural models, tacking on the role of middleman in large-scale trafficking, and constituting a definitive organizational model.'³

However, the serious threat posed by these other criminal organisations over the last twenty years must not be under-estimated.⁴ A comparative approach to the study of Italian *mafie* is useful particularly in regard to female roles. Though there is insufficient space here to draw such a comparison, it should be known that women in the Camorra have been traditionally present in the activities of the organisation more than in the other associations.⁵ Given the fact that the Sacra Corona Unita was created in prison and then

¹Translation partly borrowed from Paul Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents*, p. 422. For a juridical explanation of this article, added to that of *associazione per delinquere* (416) in 1982, see Giuliano Turone, *Il delitto di associazione mafiosa*, Giuffrè, Milano, 1995. For all the antimafia legislation since 1956 see Gherardo Colombo, Luigi Magistro (a cura di), *La legislazione antimafia*, Giuffrè, Milano, 1994.

² For the connections linking Italian criminal organisations, Nicola Tranfaglia, *La mafia come metodo*, Laterza, Bari, 1991.

³ Renate Siebert, *Secrets of Life and Death*, Verso, London, 1996, p.6.

⁴ For the development of the 'Ndrangheta, Ufficio Studi e Documentazione del Ministero di Grazia e Giustizia, 'Il problema della criminalità organizzata all'attenzione del C.S.M.', *Quaderni del Consiglio Superiore della magistratura*, 110, Anno 2000, pp.75-105.

⁵ Felia Allum, 'Donne nella Camorra napoletana 1950-2000', in AA.VV., *donne e mafie. Il ruolo delle donne nelle organizzazioni criminali internazionali*, Dipartimento Scienze Penali, Università di Palermo, Palermo, 2003, pp.14-21.

only recently, it is obvious women were used to a great extent by the criminal organisation.⁶ Two related circumstances immediately involved women in the Sacra Corona Unita: first, since the men were in prison, women were indispensable in setting up the organisation; and second, this need occurred in the 1980s when the role of women in society was changing. Generally speaking, in comparing the use of women in organised crime groups, even at the international level, the more hierarchical the association, the less women are involved.⁷

The term 'mafia', commonly indicating the Cosa Nostra, might also be used to label the other major criminal organisations that share the features summarised below.

1. Firstly, mafia organisations are composed of criminal groups, with members from all levels of society, involved in illegal activities aimed at accumulating wealth and power. Secondly, they control a given territory through violence or intimidation, thus imposing *omertà* (the 'law of silence').⁸ Such detailed control, achieved mainly by extorting money from all businesses in the territory (shops, bars, clubs, markets, etc.), has been significantly called *signoria territoriale* ('territorial sovereignty').⁹ Thirdly, these criminal organisations either have tight links with the political sphere or are directly part of it. This is true at both local and national levels and is their way of obtaining impunity and public resources through awards of public contracts. Fourthly, they are known as *onorata società* ('honoured society') and their members are called *uomini d'onore* ('men of honour') since the 'code of honour' apparently permeates the mafia sub-culture. Finally, since these associations have no written code, being criminal and secret, an oral tradition perpetuates their mechanisms and ideology.

So what is special about the mafia compared to other forms of organised crime? In areas where the mafia is widespread, the boundaries between the mafia and civil society are blurred. At the bottom of society, mafia clans easily appeal to a great number of workers by offering more opportunities than the state. At the political level, the mafia tightly binds itself to administrators by exchanging electoral votes for public resources and exemption from punishment. Finally, mafia members are welcome in the financial and commercial world because they launder great amounts of illegal funds by investing them in legal activities. Those who belong to the legitimate world but help the mafia could be considered

⁶Monica Massari, Cataldo Motta, 'Il ruolo della donna nella Sacra Corona Unita', in *ibid.*, pp.52-65.

⁷AA.VV., *Donne e mafie*.

⁸Amelia Crisantino, *Capire la mafia*, La Luna, Palermo, 1994, p. 117.

⁹Umberto Santino, *Storia del movimento antimafia*, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 2000.

part of the mafia system since they feed the system. On a judicial level, an article in the Italian penal code entitled *concorso in associazione mafiosa* deals specifically with people who, though not formally members, favour illegal organised crime activities.¹⁰ The above article is crucial because it enables investigators to break the mafia connection with the legitimate world, particularly with politicians. However, this kind of criminal involvement is quite difficult to prove.

The above description of mafia features suggests that defining the mafia merely as 'organised crime' is reductive. Instead, as mafia expert Umberto Santino insists, the complexity of the phenomenon should be stressed since it displays social, cultural, economic and political aspects.¹¹

Because the history presented here concerns Cosa Nostra, we should look at its hierarchical structure. The basic group, called the Family, corresponds to a controlled territory of great importance to mafia identity since the Family takes its name from there.¹² At the bottom of the pyramid, there are fifty to three hundred *soldati* (soldiers), *uomini d'onore* from each Family, who elect the *rappresentante* (representative) from the Family, who then in turn appoints a *vicerappresentante*. Between the *rappresentante* and *soldati* lies the *capodecina* who leads ten *soldati*. In the province of Palermo, where Cosa Nostra's oldest settlements are found, the level of *mandamento* also exists. This is made up of three Families from contiguous territories and led by the *capo-mandamento* who is elected by the *rappresentanti* from the Families. In other Sicilian provinces (including Agrigento, Trapani, Enna, Caltanissetta and Catania), the *rappresentanti* from the Families elect the *rappresentanti* from the province who comprise the *commissione regionale* ('regional commission').¹³ The basic rule of the organisation is that every Family must control the activities in its territory where *soldati* cannot operate any traffic without permission from the Family's *rappresentante*.¹⁴ Families are independent in terms of local activities, yet are compelled to follow the general strategy decided by the *Cupola*, or

¹⁰Luigi De Liguori, *Concorso e contiguità nell'associazione mafiosa*, Giuffrè, Milano, 1996.

¹¹For the meaning of *signoria territoriale* see Umberto Santino's numerous works. See, for instance, Umberto Santino, *La mafia interpretata. Dilemmi, stereotipi, paradigmi*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 1995, pp.129-156.

¹²For a description of Cosa Nostra's organisation, Guido Lo Forte, 'The Sicilian Mafia: a Profile Based on Judicially Confirmed Evidence', *Modern Italy*, 9, 1, May 2004.

¹³Ministero di Grazia e Giustizia, 'Il problema della criminalità', pp.22-23.

¹⁴For a synthetic description of Cosa Nostra structure, Anton Blok, *Honour and Violence*, Polity Press, Oxford, 2001, p. 88.

coordinating commission. This hierarchical structure has been successful inasmuch as it has become an international criminal model imitated by other criminal organisations.¹⁵

The selection of mafia members occurs after a period of observation of the candidate who must show himself ruthless and able to keep secrets.¹⁶ The selected man is then introduced through an initiation ceremony during which he must swear eternal faith to the criminal organisation.¹⁷ The fact that affiliation with the mafia Family is expected to be more important than to one's natural family should be stressed and is important to this thesis. Affiliation through the ceremony of initiation is strictly banned to women. Being male is one of the requirements for gaining mafia membership.

3.1.1. *Mafia studies*

Although primary sources on the mafia are scarce since it is a secret criminal association and leaves no written traces, mafia studies abound. Most of them rely on the same sources, constituting a sort of bibliographic cross-reference. Like all issues with political implications, interpretations of the mafia tend to be influenced by the political climate in which the interpretation was carried out.¹⁸ In order to illustrate the most noteworthy work on the mafia by historians, sociologists and anthropologists, I shall present here the pivotal debates on mafia structure and aetiology.¹⁹

The debate on mafia structure, connected to that on its nature, revolves around the question of whether the mafia is a collective name indicating separate groups that share the same subculture, or a formal and structured criminal organisation. Nowadays, such a discussion seems to have been settled as far as what scholars state on the latter position has been confirmed by a body of judicial evidence.²⁰ The confession of mafia boss Tommaso

¹⁵Falcone Giovanni, 'Che cosa è la mafia', in Giovanni Falcone, *Interventi e proposte* (1982-1992), Fondazione Giovanni e Francesca Falcone, Sansoni Editore, Milano, 1994, p.347. This Falcone's paper was published also in *Micromega*, 3, 1992, pp. 7-14.

¹⁶For the list of characteristics the candidate must show see Guido Lo Forte, 'The Sicilian Mafia', p. 70.

¹⁷For descriptions of mafia ritual given by informers from 1877 to present days, Diego Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia. The Business of Private Protection*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 262-270.

¹⁸Anton Blok, *The Mafia of a Sicilian Village 1860-1960*, Harper, New York, 1975, p.6. Paolo Pezzino has clearly illustrated to what extent political historical conjunctures influenced definitions of the mafia. Paolo Pezzino, 'Stato violenza società. Nascita e sviluppo del paradigma mafioso', in Aymard Maurice, Giuseppe Giarrizzo (a cura di), *La Sicilia, Storia d'Italia*, Einaudi, Torino, 1987, pp. 905-982.

¹⁹The same debate occurred among American scholars. Significantly Francis Ianni wrote: 'these contrasting conceptions about the mafia have persisted for more than two decades, in one of the most extraordinary sociological puzzles of the times', Francis A. J. Ianni, *A family Business. Kinship and Social Control in Organised crime*, Russel Sage Foundation, New York, 1972, p. 8.

²⁰For a summary of the two positions, Christopher Duggan, *Fascism and the Mafia*, Yale University Press, London, 1989, pp. 88-91.

Buscetta in 1984 was a Copernican revolution in mafia studies.²¹ Up to then, most scholars (such as Anton Blok, Henner Hess, and Jane and Peter Schneider) believed the mafia was composed of loose, unconnected criminal groups.²² Therefore, they focussed their interest primarily on the cultural dimension, i.e. mafia behaviour based on the code of honour and vendetta. Scholars shifted their perspective after Buscetta revealed the mafia as a hierarchical organisation, called Cosa Nostra, composed of different mafia Families coordinated by a commission.²³ Evidence of a structured and coordinated organisation existed before Tommaso Buscetta's testimony, however journalists, politicians, judges and common people tended to deny it. Historian Salvatore Lupo reported evidence of some trials in the late nineteenth century against hierarchically organised associations such as the *Fratuzzi* from *Bagheria* and the *Stoppaghieri* from *Monreale*.²⁴ Lupo's thesis is also confirmed by Palermo Police Chief Ermanno Sangiorgi's report, analysed in detail by John Dickie, who sustains that 'in 1890, the mafia was already a murderous and sophisticated criminal association with powerful political connections and an international reach.'²⁵ The presence of an organised association was also verified in 1937 when boss Michele Allegra confessed the mafia was divided into Families led by a chief.²⁶ Giuseppe Luppino gave a similar confession in March 1958, recorded in a 1950's ruling that I discovered in a 1990s trial document.²⁷ Not only did Luppino tell the police he was initiated by mafiosi, but he also described in detail the structure of the mafia just as Buscetta did, yet thirty years earlier. Finally, in the mid-1960s, judge Cesare Terranova pointed out that the danger of mafia Families lay in their capacity for coordination.²⁸

²¹Umberto Santino divided the history of the analysis of the Mafia into two periods, ante-Buscetta and post-Buscetta. Santino, *La mafia interpretata*, p. 15. Letizia Paoli, 'The Pentiti's Contribution to the Conceptualisation of the Mafia Phenomenon', in Vincenzo Ruggiero, Nigel South and Ian Taylor (eds.), *The New European Criminology. Crime and Social Order in Europe*, Routledge, London, 1998, p. 266.

²²Henner Hess, *Mafia*, Laterza, Bari, 1973; Jane Schneider and Peter Schneider, *Culture and Political Economy in Western Sicily*, Academic Press, London, 1976; Blok, *The Mafia*. For a critique to Hess, Lupo, *Storia della mafia*, Donzelli, Roma, 1996, pp. 31-32, and Aymard, Giarrizzo, *La Sicilia*, p. 954.

²³Lupo, *Storia della mafia*, p. 266.

²⁴For a detailed historical reconstruction of the trial concerning the *stoppaghieri* see the very good work by Amelia Crisantino, *Della segreta e operosa associazione. Una setta all'origine della mafia*, Sellerio, Palermo, 2000.

²⁵John Dickie, *Cosa Nostra. A History of the Sicilian Mafia*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 2004, p. XVI.

²⁶For a description of hierarchically structured criminal associations in the fascist period, Paolo Pezzino, *Mafia: industria della violenza*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze, 1995, p.172, and Salvatore Lupo, *Storia della mafia*, pp. 43-63.

²⁷Corte d'Assisi di Trapani., Sentenza n.5/96

²⁸For Terranova's early understanding of the mafia's structure see Giuseppe Di Lello, *Giudici*, Sellerio, Palermo, 1996.

Although this thesis acknowledges the importance of reconstructing the history of the mafia by searching for past clues confirming the 'Buscetta theorem', employing only this approach might bring a narrow understanding of the mafia. This interpretation, in fact, is based mainly on judicial documents and thus influenced by a criminal investigation perspective. Mafia studies in Italy have recently suffered from the correspondence between scholars' and judges' interpretations of the phenomenon. The relationship between scholars studying the mafia and Public prosecutors investigating it is fundamental and delicate. Any overlapping of interpretations would be misleading. When scholars were conditioned by an investigator's view, they tended to overlook the cultural dimension of the phenomenon, which instead emerge from other sources such as oral ones. Similar to our view, Letizia Paoli criticized those scholars committed to an economic framework of analysis who made the mistake of neglecting 'the symbolic dimension of the mafia, thus preventing any real understanding of what it means to be a ritually affiliated member of a mafia family, or to be part of the social basis granting legitimation to the mafia itself.'²⁹

Moreover, putting too much emphasis on Buscetta's theorem, and thus on the hierarchic structure of the mafia, might lead to neglecting the importance of the individual clans. Early scholars warned about such risk even after having revisited their 1960s position in the light of confessions from *pentiti* and new historical evidence.³⁰ As the Schneiders put it in their last work on the history of antimafia movement: 'We do, however, continue to question the tendency for police and prosecutorial models to represent the *cosca* and the coordinating bodies as super-secret, clearly bounded, and, like conspiracies, acting in concert, for this underplays the systematic practice of single mafiosi to cultivate strategic relationships in a wider social and political universe.'³¹

The debate on the aetiology of the mafia also suffers from the same theoretical confusion between judicial and academic analyses. Two schools of thought can be identified in relation to the causes of the mafia, the 'culturalist' and 'judicial.' Before exploring them, an outdated view is worth mentioning, which ascribed the causes of the

²⁹Letizia Paoli, 'The Pentiti Contributions', in Ruggiero, South, Taylor, *The New European Criminology*, p.266.

³⁰Arlacchi reviewed his position, see introduction of his book on Calderone, Pino Arlacchi, *Gli uomini del disonore: la mafia siciliana nella vita del grande pentito Antonino Calderone*, Mondadori, Milano, 1992. The Schneiders revisited their view in their last book on the antimafia, Jane Schneider and Paul Schneider, *Reversible Destiny*, University of California, Berkeley, 2003, p. 47.

³¹*ibid.*, p. 48.

mafia to the character of the Sicilian people thus dating its origins to an indefinite past. The following quotation gives a clear idea of this view:

The mafia is far from being anything accidental. It must be considered, on the one hand, an expression of the soul of the island, and, on the other, as the exasperation or maximum common denominator of certain human facts universally widespread on the island, facts more or less evident depending on the circumstances, places, time, and the individuals themselves. (...) The cause of the phenomenon is the moral idleness of a people who have not shown the energy to exist as a people. Everyone is closed up inside himself or herself and an insurmountable barrier, built by the people themselves, has cut off communication with others, society, the State, and the world. From this point of view, the mafia is the tale of an ancestral incommunicability.³²

The above observation, reflecting a literary image of Sicily and the mafia,³³ was scientifically misleading, since it implied an almost immediate general correspondence between Sicilians and mafiosi. Spampinato rightly makes the point that 'this metaphysical vision of Sicily could in some ways be justified in a writer who made the reality of this island his special source of inspiration, the ideal place for the artistic representation of the universal condition of man, yet it cannot be accepted as legitimate within a historical discourse.'³⁴ This interpretation is mentioned here because it is important to avoid confusion with what we call the culturalist approach.

The main debate regarding the origins of the mafia revolves around the question of whether the mafia is a relict of past feudal society or a product of modernisation. This enquiry is part of the wider debate on the 'Southern Question', wherein the traditional *meridionalista* view was challenged by a new generation of scholars represented by the historical journal *Meridiana*, as anticipated in the introduction of this thesis.³⁵ Contrary to the immobile *meridionalista* portrait of the Sicilian 19th century, this school depicted the period as one of deep transformations.³⁶ In the traditional reading of Southern Italy by Pasquale Villari and Gaetano Salvemini, and later by Rosario Romeo, the South was represented through backwardness since the *latifondo* (large estate) dominated the economic system of the countryside. Assisted by *campieri* (armed guards), *gabelloti*

³²Pio Libero Virgilio Titone, *Storia mafia e costume in Sicilia*, Milano 1964, pp.164-65. A similar position is in Gaetano Falzone, *Storia della mafia*, Flaccovio, Palermo, 1984 (first edition: 1974), p. 20.

³³See the image of Sicilians given by novelists such as Tommasi Di Lampedusa and Leonardo Sciascia.

³⁴Aymard, Giarrizzo, *La Sicilia*, p. 887.

³⁵See the introduction to the collective work edited by Robert Lumley and Jonathan Morris, *The New History of the Italian South*, University of Exeter Press, London, 1998.

³⁶For a clear sum of this view see Linda Reeder, *Women in White. Migration and Transformation of Rural Italian Women, 1880-1920*, University of Toronto Press, London, 2003, p. 13.

(leaseholders of the *latifondo*) managed the land on behalf of absentee landowners by using violence to control the peasants.³⁷ Generally speaking, the formal abolition of feudalism in 1812 weakened landowners whose best land was acquired by the *gabelloti* at low prices, while the worst land was left to the peasants who, in addition, lost their common rights.³⁸ According to Emilio Sereni, the *gabelloti*, unlike Northern Italy's middle class, were unable to contribute to the modernisation of the countryside. In other words, they did not display an entrepreneurial attitude and bring modern improvements to management of the land. Instead, thanks to their intermediate position, they played a parasitic role and exploited the peasantry. The outcome was that while *gabelloti* took advantage of the transformation of relationships in the countryside, they never contributed to modernising them.

Up to the 1980s, the prevailing mafia paradigm was that of scholars such as Leopoldo Franchetti, Giuseppe Alongi, Napoleone Colajanni, Giovanni Lorenzoni, Emilio Sereni, Herman Hess, Anton Blok, Jane and Peter Schneider, and Rosario Romeo.³⁹ In light of the above view, *meridionalisti* interpreted the mafia as a residue of feudal society, which enabled mafiosi, either *gabelloti* or *campieri*, to enrich themselves by exercising violence. Franchetti, indeed, called the mafia the '*industria della violenza*' ('industry of violence'). His view, which had long-term influence on various interpretations of the mafia, identified the origins of the mafia in the unfinished and thus failed modernisation of the agricultural economy in the Southern countryside.⁴⁰

For revisionists, the heuristic *meridionalisti* model was unable to grasp the complexity of the changing economy and society of the *Mezzogiorno* (Southern Italy)⁴¹ thus ignoring the diversity of the Southern economy or, more accurately, economies. To them the category of "backwardness" used to interpret the South did not grasp 'the socio-economic structure of the various regions of the *Mezzogiorno*' which 'stemmed from a set of

³⁷On the condition of peasants see Duggan, *Fascism*, p.11; Salvatore Francesco Romano, *Storia della mafia*, Mondadori, Milano, 1966; Hess, *Mafia*; Blok, *The Mafia*.

³⁸For a clear explanation of the relationship between landowners and *gabelloti*, Duggan, *Fascism* p. 109.

³⁹Leopoldo Franchetti e Sidney Sonnino, *Inchiesta in Sicilia*, Vallecchi, Firenze, 1876 (new edition: 1974); Napoleone Colajanni, *Nel regno della mafia* (dai Borboni ai Sabaudi), Palermo, 1900; Giovanni Lorenzoni, 'Sicilia', in *Inchiesta parlamentare sulle condizioni dei contadini nelle province meridionali e nella Sicilia*, vol.VI, tomo I (parte I e II), Roma, 1910; Emilio Sereni, *Il capitalismo nelle campagne*, Einaudi, Torino, 1971; Hess, *Mafia*; Schneider and Schneider, *Culture*; Blok, *The Mafia*; Rosario Romeo, *Il Risorgimento in Sicilia*, Laterza, Bari, 1970.

⁴⁰On the question of the failure of capitalist relationships in the Southern countryside, Sereni, *Il capitalismo*.

⁴¹For a new approach to the history of Sicily, Francesco Renda, *Storia della Sicilia dal 1860 al 1970*, Sellerio, Palermo, 1984.

“traditional” responses to human (e.g. societal) and physical (e.g. climatic) factors. These structures evolved over time in response to changing conditions, and could not, therefore, be explained away by historians as relics of a previous age’.⁴² As a consequence of rejecting the general *meridionalisai* view, revisionists challenged even traditional interpretations of the mafia by replacing ‘the violent entrepreneurs of older interpretations’ with ‘entrepreneurs of violence who sell the commodity of trust not as agents for a particular class or stratum, but as autonomous “businessmen” acting “rationally” in their own interests.’⁴³ Unlike the revisionist position, the *meridionalista* attitude was in line with the view, analysed above, that denied the organised structure of mafia clans. Supporters of the new scholarship maintained that their hypothesis was based on reliable evidence, unlike the traditional studies. Indeed, as seen above, they discovered late 19th century evidence indicating the unity of the mafia, and the specific names of the associations with their ritual affiliation. Moreover, they were able to date urban mafia activity back to the late 19th century. Hence, contrary to perspectives focussing on the *latifondo* as the economic system that facilitated the outbreak of the mafia, they stressed that the mafia also existed and flourished in rich areas such as the one surrounding Palermo, called the ‘Conca d’Oro’ (‘Golden Valley’), where the land was divided into small properties.⁴⁴ Paolo Pezzino observed that areas where the mafia operated were not only restricted to the inland countryside, dominated by the *latifondo*, but also to: ‘coastal areas, well-connected to the major central towns, with intensive cultivation and more divided proprieties, mountain areas difficult to reach, villages on inland *latifondo*: in other words, various environments which were different in terms of social stratification and types of production.’⁴⁵ Moreover, this new scholarship maintains that the mafia cannot exclusively be related to a specific social group as proposed by the *meridionalisti*:

even if *campieri* (field guards) and *soprastanti* (overseers) were accused, in numerous testimonies, of being its central nucleus, the Prefect of Trapani, Cotta Ramusino, maintained that those more involved were brokers, barbers, goat herders, bakers, millers and pasta-makers, coachmen and carters, all figures who were small

⁴²Lumley and Morris, *The New History*, p. 5.

⁴³*ibid.*, p.6.

⁴⁴Lupo, *Storia della mafia*, pp.88-89. Salvatore Lupo, ‘Nei giardini della Conca d’oro’, *Italia Contemporanea*, 156, 1984, pp.43-53; Raimondo Catanzaro, *Il delitto come impresa. Storia sociale della mafia*, Rizzoli, Milano, 1988 English edition: Raimondo Catanzaro, *Men of Respect. A Social History of the Sicilian Mafia*, Free Press, New York, 1992.

⁴⁵Paolo Pezzino, ‘Nascita e sviluppo del paradigma mafioso’, in Giarrizzo, Aymard, *La Sicilia*, p. 939.

artisans and common people, while the Prefect of Agrigento maintained it extended to all classes, from the Baron to the sulphur miner.⁴⁶

Lupo even argued that the traditional model of interpretation provided the ruling class with the excuse of requesting more and more public funding. Indeed, the exaggeration of the Southern Question, and the explanation of the mafia related to generic social problems rather than events and people concerning formal criminal organisations, provided a good excuse for obtaining public money, which was eventually redirected for personal ends rather than invested in public projects. In other words, a vague interpretation of the mafia helped avoid singling out specific individuals, whether members of the criminal association or helpful outsiders.⁴⁷ Finally, the new scholarship asserted the mafia was part of the modernisation process:

The events of the 20th century showed that mafia networks strengthened during the modernization processes that took place in the island, whether this concerned social (emigration) or political and economic aspects (productive development, export). After all, even the *latifondo* areas were not cut off from the processes of improvement, such as the spreading of new rotations; the *gabellotti* certainly missed none of the new opportunities opened the expansion cycles, as demonstrated in Blok's study.⁴⁸

Indeed, the mafia has survived despite social and cultural change by adapting its structure and ideology to modernity. Therefore, this new scholarship considers the mafia neither a relic of the past nor a behavioural attitude harking back to a historical Sicilian condition, marked by distrust of the State, which therefore led to self-justice, the code of honour, 'familism' and its related individualism, and so on. Rather, it is a specific criminal organisation that has transformed alongside the development of society. Lupo, the leading exponent of the revisionist current, affirmed: 'Many thought the mafia would disappear when people heard the whistle of the locomotive in the desolate Sicilian countryside. They never imagined we would still be discussing the mafia even after the whistle of the train, the sonic boom of the jet, and the beep of the computer.'⁴⁹ Revisionists seem to suggest their interpretation finds confirmation in the evolution of the mafia over the past thirty years.

My opinion is that since all the points of view analysed so far help understand the mafia, a balanced approach must necessarily be employed. Rocco Sciarrone rightly noted

⁴⁶*ibid*, p.939.

⁴⁷Lupo, *Storia della mafia*, p.19.

⁴⁸Aymard, Giarrizzo, *La Sicilia*, p. 972; Raimondo Catanzaro, *Il delitto*.

⁴⁹Lupo, *Storia della mafia*, p. 19.

that overemphasising one position would lead to a misinterpretation of the phenomenon.⁵⁰ Indeed, both the interrelated discussions on the nature and origin of the mafia can be resolved by defining the mafia as a phenomenon of *ibridazione* (hybridisation).⁵¹ This term allows us to comprehend the apparent contradictions showed by mafia associations: organised versus loose structures, and tradition versus modernity. In other words, if we consider a range of multiple kinds of evidence (such as oral and written, official and unofficial) and methods (including quantitative and qualitative), we reach the conclusion that the mafia embraces both traditional and modern aspects, and the criminal association is well-structured and well-characterised, yet its members belong to a larger society, with which they share the social, cultural and political context. The concept of *ibridazione* explains why the mafia has been able to adapt itself to social and economic transformation, yet at the same time to maintain archaic and primitive symbols, ceremonies, and codes belonging to a traditional cultural setting.⁵² In the course of this study, the mafia's capacity to manipulate the traditional value system shared by the population will be considered in detail, particularly in the chapter devoted to the traditional role of women in the mafia. As we shall see, the discussion of the impact of modernisation on the mafia is particularly relevant to the topic of this thesis. Indeed, reflections on how the role of women has changed in the mafia may contribute to clarifying the ambiguous relationship between the mafia and modern society. A good example of such a relationship is the persistence of the code of honour in the mafia within a social context that theoretically has been undergoing a process of 'detraditionalisation.'

3.1.2 Recent Studies

A new wave of mafia studies has spread since the assassinations of magistrates Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino in 1992, reflecting public opinion's general antimafia concerns following such a national tragedy. Numerous civil society associations against the mafia sprung up throughout Italy, often carrying out research on a wide range of themes concerning the mafia.⁵³ Disciplines, such as psychology and criminology, which

⁵⁰Rocco Sciarone, *Mafie vecchie, mafia nuove*, Donzelli, Roma, 1998, pp. 3-9.

⁵¹I borrowed this concept from Raimondo Catanzaro, *Il delitto*.

⁵²Catanzaro, *ibid.*, pp. 137-138.

⁵³For a complete list of anti-mafia associations see Santino, *Storia*, pp. 335-344.

had previously neglected the mafia as a subject of study, now began to deal with it.⁵⁴ The prevailing analysis among sociologists was of the mafia as an enterprise. This was the case with Gambetta who analysed the mafia as an industry that sells protection.⁵⁵ Remarkable studies also appeared on the Camorra, the Sacra Corona Unita, and the 'Ndrangheta.⁵⁶ Italian economists also began to deal with organised crime, even if much later than their American colleagues. The mafia was considered a distortion of the rules of the market since it hindered healthy economic development and thereby brought disadvantages to the nation in terms of competition.⁵⁷

The new aspect of mafia studies was concerned with the inner world of the criminal organisation. Psychoanalysts, who as early as the 1970s conceived the notion of '*sentire mafioso*' ('mafia feeling'), attempted to explore the subconscious of mafia members in order to understand the dynamics on which mafia behaviour relies.⁵⁸ This interest in the private aspects of the mafia emerged clearly from studies that approached the mafia from a gender perspective. Anna Puglisi, of the *Centro di Documentazione Siciliano Giuseppe Impastato*, was the first to focus attention on this and, along with Antonia Cascio, collected a useful selection of newspaper articles on mafia women.⁵⁹ In 1994, sociologist Renate Siebert performed an academic study that combined a theoretical approach with life stories.⁶⁰ Another important study was done by Prosecutor Teresa Principato and

⁵⁴Criminological studies on the mafia rose thanks to the school of 'New Criminology', T. Bandini, M. Lagazzi, M.I. Marugo (a cura di), *La criminalità organizzata. Moderne metodologie di ricerca e nuove ipotesi esplicative*, Giuffrè, Milano, 1993.

⁵⁵Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia*. For a critique of Gambetta's work, Santino, *La mafia interpretata*, pp. 30-60, and Saverio Di Bella's review of the book in *Incontri meridionali*, 3, 1992, pp. 599-602.

⁵⁶Monica Massari, *La sacra corona unita*, Laterza, Bari, 1996. Enzo Ciconte, *'Ndrangheta. Dall'Unità a oggi*, Laterza, Bari, 1992.

⁵⁷Stefano Zamagni (a cura di), *Mercati illegali e mafie. L'economia del crimine organizzato*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1993. L. Donato, D. Masciandaro, *Criminalità e intermediazione finanziaria. Economia e diritto*, Edibank, Milano, 1996. M. Centorrino, G. Signorino (a cura di), *Macroeconomia della mafia*, La Nuova Italia Scientifica, Roma, 1997. E. Fantò, *L'impresa a partecipazione mafiosa. Economia legale ed economia criminale*, Dedalo, Bari, 1999.

⁵⁸Giuseppe Casarrubea, Pia Blandano, *L'educazione mafiosa*, Sellerio, Palermo, 1991. Girolamo Lo Verso, *La mafia dentro. Psicologia e psicopatologia di un fondamentalismo*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 1998. Franco Di Forti, *Le radici profonde della mafia*, Siva editore, Roma, 1971. Silvia Di Lorenzo, *La grande madre mafia. Psicoanalisi del potere mafioso*, Pratiche Editrici, Parma, 1996. For a psychologist approach, Franco Di Maria, Gioacchino Lavanco, *A un passo dall'inferno. Sentire mafioso e obbedienza criminale*, Giunti, Firenze, 1995; I. Fiore, *Le radici inconsce dello psichismo mafioso*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 1997; G. Lo Verso, G. Lo Coco, S. Ristretta, G. Zizzo, (a cura di), *Come cambia la mafia. Esperienze giudiziarie e psicoterapeutiche in un paese che cambia*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 1999.

⁵⁹Puglisi Anna-Antonia Cascio (a cura di), *Con e contro. Le donne nell'organizzazione mafiosa e nella lotta contro la mafia*, Centro siciliano di documentazione Giuseppe Impastato, Palermo, 1987.

⁶⁰Siebert, *Secrets of Life*.

sociologist Alessandra Dino.⁶¹ The first analysed the issue from a judicial perspective and the second from a sociologist one, focussing on the relationship between mafia women and their religiosity. Finally, the journalistic work of Liliana Madeo and Clare Longrigg must be mentioned, both which contain a great deal of detail on the customs and folklore of mafia women.⁶² The most recent work on mafia women was based on a multi-disciplinary research project coordinated by criminal law Professor Giovanni Fiandaca and antimafia Public Prosecutor Teresa Principato.⁶³ The research, in which I have been involved, explored the role of women not only in the Italian mafias but also in international organised crimes, including Russia, Argentina, Brazil, Albania, US, Germany and Japan.

3.1.3. *The name*

The etymology of the word 'mafia' is uncertain; however we know for sure that this term, as well as the word 'fascism', was exported from the Italian context to indicate similar phenomena in other countries. The following hypotheses show that many scholars have attempted to uncover the origins of the word 'mafia.'⁶⁴

The etymology could stem from the Arabic words *maha'fat*, meaning protection and immunity, or '*maha*', meaning *cava di pietra* (stone quarry) perhaps in reference to the place where secret associations used to meet.⁶⁵ It might come from the name of one of the Arab clans that administrated Sicily during Muslim domination, '*Ma afir*'. In reference to Italian patriotic societies, the term could be an acronym meaning either '*Morte Alla Francia Italia Anela*' (Italy longs for the death of France), related to the Sicilian riots against the French government in 1282 (the *Vespri Siciliani*); or '*Mazzini autorizza furti, incendi, avvelenamenti*' (Mazzini authorises robberies, fires, and poisoning'), related to the nationalism of the 19th century Italian *Risorgimento*.⁶⁶

⁶¹Teresa Principato, Alessandra Dino, *Mafia Donna. Le vestali del sacro e dell'onore*, Flaccovio, Palermo, 1997.

⁶²Clare Longrigg, *Mafia Women*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1997.

Liliana Madeo, *Donne di mafia*, Baldini & Castoldi, Torino, 1997.

⁶³AA.VV., *donne e mafie*.

⁶⁴A complete list of the etymologies of the word mafia is to be found in Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia*, pp. 260-261. See also John Follain, *A Dishonoured Society*, Little Brown and Company, London, 1995, pp.16-18.

⁶⁵Giuseppe Guido Loschiavo, *Cento anni di mafia*, Roma, Vito Bianco, 1962, p. 29.

⁶⁶The translation of the acronyms is borrowed from Duggan, *Fascism*, p.15.

In the early twentieth century, anthropologist Giuseppe Pitrè stated that the attribution of the word mafia to a criminal phenomenon was made to discredit Sicily. Pitrè was, in fact, one of the first exponents of the ideology of *sicilianismo*,⁶⁷ which denied the existence of the mafia as a criminal phenomenon in order to defend the image of Sicilians. An expression of the ruling class, the ideology of *sicilianismo* aimed at maintaining the *status quo*, and hence the mafia system. Therefore, followers of *sicilianismo* tended to confuse the etymology of the word in order to avoid a clear definition and thus an explanation of the criminal phenomenon.⁶⁸ According to his apologetic view, Pitrè stated that the term originally meant 'beauty', but shifted depending on whether the word was female or male:

A lovely girl, who appears to us as aware of being just that, and who is well-built, and has an overall *je ne sais quoi*, superior and lofty, has a quality of *mafia* and is *mafiusa*, *mafiusedda*... to the idea of beauty, the word *mafia* adds the idea of superiority and ability in the best sense of the word. In relation to a man, the word means something more: the awareness of being a man, secure in his soul, and beyond this, self-confidence but never boldness in a bad sense, never arrogance, never haughtiness. The *mafia* or Mafioso man seen in this natural and proper sense should never frighten anyone, because few are as pleasant and respectful as he.⁶⁹

Pitrè's explanation is a good example of what the new scholarship claimed, namely the direct correlation between the meanings attributed to the term mafia and explanations of the phenomenon. The positive meaning of the word depended on Pitrè's indulgent interpretation of the mafia.

It is neither a sect nor an association; it has no rules or statutes. (...) Put together a bit of self-confidence, arrogance, ability, high-handedness, and the result will be something similar to the mafia, but without being the mafia. (...) The *mafioso* is neither a thief nor a bandit. (...) The mafia is the consciousness of one's own being, the exaggerated concept of individual power, the unique and sole arbiter of any conflict, any conflict of interests and ideas; (...).⁷⁰

Pitrè maintained the word was erroneously attributed to a criminal phenomenon after the 1862 performance of the comedy *I Mafiusi di la Vicaria*, responsible for the diffusion of

⁶⁷On *sicilianismo*, Giuseppe Giarrizzo, *Mezzogiorno senza meridionalismo. La Sicilia, lo sviluppo, il potere*, Marsilio, Venezia, 1992, p. 3, and Gian Carlo Marino, *Ideologia sicilianista*, Flaccovio, Palermo, 1971. In *Sicilia e sicilitudine* (1970) Leonardo Sciascia explained the difference between *sicilianismo* and *sicilitudine*. For a summary of the features of *sicilitudine* see Massimo Onofri, *Tutti a cena da don Mariano*, Bompiani, Milano, 1996, p.20.

⁶⁸For this thesis see Pezzino, 'Nascita e sviluppo del paradigma mafioso', in Giarrizzo, Aymard, *La Sicilia*, p.928.

⁶⁹Giuseppe Pitrè, *Usi e costumi, credenze e pregiudizi del popolo siciliano*, 1900, Palermo. Giuseppe Pitrè, *La mafia e l'omertà*, Brancato Editore, Milano, 2002, p.10. This quotation can be found in Onofri, *Tutti a cena*, p.38.

⁷⁰Quoted from Pezzino, 'Nascita e sviluppo del paradigma mafioso', in Giarrizzo, Aymard, *La Sicilia*, p. 926.

that misleading attribution of meaning.⁷¹ It is true the word 'mafiosi' appeared in its modern meaning in the comedy *I Mafiusi di la Vicaria*, written in Sicilian dialect in 1862 by two actors, Giuseppe Rizzotto and Gaetano Mosca. The plot of the comedy was based on the daily life of several criminals in a Palermo prison where 'they spoke in colourful jargon, played cards, duelled with knives and observed a rudimentary hierarchy.'⁷² Thanks to the success of the play performed throughout Italy (although spoken in Sicilian dialect), the criminal meaning of the word spread nationally.

According to novelist Leonardo Sciascia, the word appeared for the first time in 1658 as an epithet for a heretic woman, and an adjective meaning audacious and arrogant.⁷³

The first appearance in an official document of the word mafia in its modern meaning was made in a report of Prefect Filippo Gualtieri. Sent to Sicily in 1865 to quell the riots that had broken out against the centralisation of the new post-unification government, Gualtieri made unscrupulous use of the term mafia in accusing criminal associations and even political opposition. The vague meaning of the word mafia⁷⁴ thus provided him with a valid alibi to justify the suppression of anti-state movements.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, according to Paolo Pezzino, Gualtieri's observations on the phenomenon were quite noteworthy. He identified 'the origins of the mafia in the existence of violent groups dependent on feudal landlords and their subsequent autonomy(...);' then he recognised 'the unbelievable tendency toward crime in the villages surrounding Palermo' and, finally he denounced 'the existence of statutes and protection networks which guaranteed impunity to the mafia.'⁷⁶ Therefore, the Palermo riots of 1866 were a crucial point in the history of the word since they marked the moment from which 'mafia' was used in its modern and criminal sense. This was confirmed by the minutes of the Inquiry Commission on the Palermo riots, which indicated that: 'The term entered common use among Sicilian civil

⁷¹ On the attribution of a negative meaning to the word mafia ascribed by Pitre to *I Mafiusi di la Vicaria* see Massimo Onofri, *Tutti a cena*, p.48.

⁷² Duggan, *Fascism*, p.17.

⁷³ Leonardo Sciascia, 'Appunti su mafia e letteratura', *Nuovi quaderni del meridione*, 5, 1964, p. 3. Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia*, p.261. Hess, *Mafia*, pp.1-2.

⁷⁴ Augusto Cavadi, *A scuola di antimafia*, CSD, Quaderni del Centro Impastato, n. 6, Palermo, 1994. Christopher Duggan, 'The Sicilian Origins of the Mafia', *Conflict Studies*, 203, 1987, p.6. The report is quoted in Pezzino, *Mafia*, pp.30-31.

⁷⁵ Lupo, *Storia della mafia*, pp.12-13.

⁷⁶ Pezzino, *Mafia*, p.30. On Gualtieri and his period see Paolo Alatri, *Lotte politiche in Sicilia sotto il governo della destra (1866-74)*, Einaudi, Torino, 1954, pp.91-

servants and politicians, since in numerous investigative examinations they made reference to the mafia as something well-known, that as such did not need to be explained.’⁷⁷

Throughout the history of Sicily, the term mafia was often utilised to define either general delinquency or political opposition.⁷⁸ As in the above case, sometimes the existence of the mafia provided a sort of alibi to repress all kinds of rebellious movements.

3.1.4 *The origins*

Evidence of the mafia as a criminal organisation, i.e. trials and police reports, can be traced back to the aftermath of Italian Unification. As Duggan observed: ‘While it has its cultural roots in feudal Sicilian life, the mafia as a form of organised crime appears to be a product of modernity, of the new freedom and opportunity of unified Italy.’⁷⁹ The new Italian state was regarded by the Southern Italian population as an outsider, just as past foreign governments had been. Piedmont extended its constitution, laws and taxation to Southern Italy without considering the different socio-economic conditions of that area. Most youths did not accept military conscription and deserted, often becoming bandits. Furthermore, the new government did not maintain Garibaldi’s promise of agrarian reform.⁸⁰ Therefore, the socio-economic situation worsened in the South, which became an overlooked periphery of the new centralised state. As one would expect, crime spread. The central government reacted by imposing a state of siege,⁸¹ thus demonstrating that ‘the Sicilian problem was regarded primarily as one of law and order’, and that ‘any other approach ran the risk of alienating the big land-owners who dominated the island.’⁸² To simplify, the deep gap between central government and periphery was filled by mafiosi.⁸³ Thereby they helped the state maintain order in the countryside against banditry and peasant unrest by holding a virtual monopoly on violence.⁸⁴ ‘The mafioso can be therefore considered as a variety of the political middleman or power broker, since his *raison d’être*

⁷⁷Aymard, Giarrizzo, *La Sicilia*, pp. 915-916.

⁷⁸On the use of the concept of the mafia for repressive ends, Duggan, *Fascism*, pp.26-27, p.30.

⁷⁹Duggan, *Fascism*, p. 3.

⁸⁰For a synthesis of those social, economical and political aspects of Italy, in the aftermath of its unification, which favoured the formation of the mafia as a form of organised crime linked to political power, Giuseppe Carlo Marino, *Storia della mafia*, Newton & Compton, Roma, 2000, p. 39.

⁸¹See the *legge Pica* (Pica law) which allowed for summary executions, military tribunals, and the imposition of *domicilio coatto* (forced residence) by a commission made up of a prefect and four local officials. Duggan, *Fascism*, p.24.

⁸²*ibid.*, p.25.

⁸³On the concepts of centre and periphery, Schneider, *Culture*, pp.1-16. On the role of middleman played by mafiosi, Blok, *The Mafia*.

⁸⁴See the Fasci’s movement and their repression in the late nineteenth century.

is predicated upon his capacity to acquire and maintain control over the paths linking the local infrastructure of the village to the superstructure of the village to the superstructure of the larger society.⁸⁵ Despite the establishment of the new state, the traditional Southern use of private violence did not end.⁸⁶

We will now move directly to the 1920s, since there is not enough space here to deal with the period between Italian unification and Fascism.⁸⁷

3. 2. *Fascism*

As one contemporary observer noted: 'On the mainland (...) socialism had been suppressed by Fascism; in Sicily, the mafia had fulfilled the same function.'⁸⁸ Indeed, in the aftermath of the First World War during the so-called *biennio rosso* (red biennium), Southern landowners, unlike their Northern counterparts, did not need the Black Shirts to preserve their estates since they were already protected by *gabelloti*.⁸⁹ Therefore, mafiosi did not initially support Fascism;⁹⁰ yet as soon as the Fascist movement became institutionalised, they realised it was necessary to deal with the new state and many mafiosi joined the Fascist party in 1924.⁹¹ This was a typical example of the mafia's political attitude, changing ideology according to the current government. That is why the mafia cannot be defined only as an anti-state organisation; it requires a much more complex interpretation.

According to expert Michele Pantaleone, 'The mafia went along with the regime and supported it more or less freely; and sometimes (when it was not blocked by a penal certificate too full of annotations or absolute illiteracy) it adhered to it completely and became a leading element.'⁹² Fascism, however, remained in competition with sections of the mafia⁹³ that controlled the territory by monopolising the market of violence. In

⁸⁵Blok, *The Mafia*, p.7. On a detailed explanation of mafiosi function see the entire work by Blok, who observed a small community in the inland Sicily.

⁸⁶For a good syntesis of the development of the mafia from the 1870s to World War I, see Schneider and Schneider, *Reversible Destiny*, pp.28-30.

⁸⁷For a detailed and well documented account of this period, James Fentress, *Rebels & Mafiosi*, Cornell University Press, London, 2000.

⁸⁸Duggan, *Fascism*, p. 100.

⁸⁹The literature on fascism and the mafia is quite vast. For good historical work, Duggan, *Fascism*, and Salvatore Lupo, 'L'utopia totalitaria del fascismo', in Aymard, Giarrizzo, *La Sicilia*, pp. 373-484. Interestingly, Cesare Mori wrote his memoire, Cesare Mori, *Con la mafia ai ferri corti*, Mondadori, Milano, 1932.

⁹⁰Romano, *Storia della mafia*, p. 257.

⁹¹Lupo, *Storia della mafia*, p. 177.

⁹²Michele Pantaleone, *Mafia e politica*, Einaudi, Torino, p. 53.

⁹³*ibid*, pp. 254-255.

addition, since the Fascist regime had eliminated democratic elections, it needed no mafia support to gather votes.⁹⁴

It is not surprising that at one point in 1925 Mussolini stated he wanted to stamp out the mafia, a goal that obviously would have been advantageous in terms of image. Indeed, its antimafia campaign was essentially political propaganda since it focussed only on that part of the mafia system inconvenient to the regime. On the contrary, the campaign avoided disturbing the upper echelons of the mafia, which included politicians and landowners representing key alliances to the regime. In showing a 'dual' policy toward the mafia, the regime was: 'a dictatorship of a political group that, having their own army, the volunteer militia for national security, did not tolerate the competition and peril of collateral groups.'⁹⁵ Moreover, 'in order to assure the endorsement of the large Sicilian landowners, who constituted an important part of the political power on the island, (the regime) was ready to leave the minor and inconvenient sections of the mafia alone.'⁹⁶

In 1925, Mussolini appointed Cesare Mori Prefect of Palermo. He had already worked in Sicily: Castelvetro for ten years, from 1904 to 1914, and Trapani from 1924 to 1925.⁹⁷ During the latter period, he wrote a book on the mafia that gained him the reputation of being an expert on the subject.⁹⁸ Mori's policy against common criminals was based on sieges of inland towns and large sweeps, which resulted in almost eleven thousand arrests in 1926 alone.⁹⁹ Interestingly to this thesis, many women, both criminals and relatives of male criminals, were captured during these 'rounds-ups.' Subsequent trials were held with no assurance of legal guarantees.¹⁰⁰ The victims of this campaign were mostly poor peasants and a few *gabelloti*, and not the great majority of landowners who escaped it by leaving their liberalism aside and becoming Fascists.¹⁰¹ Arrests of *gabelloti* were also encouraged by the *agrari*, worried they would be overcome by these *nouveaux riches* in

⁹⁴On this exchange, Michele Pantaleone, *The Mafia and Politics*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1966, p.46; Pezzino, *Mafia*, pp. 178-179.

⁹⁵ Romano, *Storia della mafia*, p. 260.

⁹⁶*ibid.*, p. 260.

⁹⁷Umberto Santino, *Storia*, p. 127. Duggan, *Fascism*, pp. 124-128.

⁹⁸Cesare Mori, *Tra le zagare oltre la foschia*, Firenze, 1923. For a detailed analysis of Mori's book, see Duggan, *Fascism*, p.123.

⁹⁹For the account of Gangi's siege, sensationally orchestrated, Duggan, *Fascism*, pp. 131-139. For a list of the towns under siege, Lupo, *Storia della mafia*, p.180.

¹⁰⁰For a description of the methods used, including violence on women in order to blackmail men during Mori's campaign, Pantaleone, *The Mafia*, p.57, and Lupo, *Storia della mafia*, p. 180.

¹⁰¹ Marino, *Storia della mafia*, pp.130-131.

the aftermath of the First World War.¹⁰² Christopher Duggan rightly observed that: 'there was the same flaw in Mori's approach to the mafia as in Fascism's response to the Southern Question. His operation had the effect of strengthening the *agrari*, and suppressing those elements (intransigent Fascists included) who threatened change.'¹⁰³ This, moreover, was demonstrated by the fact that: 'the levels that experienced the most serious consequences from the Mori campaign were in fact the more exposed groups, such as armed groups from the *Madonie*, minor mafiosi, simple delinquents, and even innocent victims of the greater mafia in the inland countryside.'¹⁰⁴

At a certain point during his campaign, Prefect Mori denounced several politicians for their links with the mafia. These included Alfredo Cucco, leader of the Fascist movement in Sicily, and Antonino Di Giorgio, member of Parliament. As a result, Mori was forced to resign; the central government gave the official reason that his task was terminated because he had managed to eliminate the mafia. Yet, it was clear that his forced departure was due to other motivations. Some felt it was because of his intent to strike the so-called 'upper mafia', namely the political level, thus considering Mori independent from Mussolini.¹⁰⁵ Others attributed his forced departure to political competition within the Fascist party. The charge of mafia association was used as a means of getting rid of those people considered awkward for the regime or in opposition to Fascism, as was the case with representatives of the peasant movement.¹⁰⁶ Mori himself confirmed this attitude: 'Calling somebody mafioso (...) was used often in perfect *malafede* (bad faith) and in any field, including politics, as a means of carrying out revenge, grudges or defeating enemies.'¹⁰⁷

The interpretation used by the Fascist regime to stamp out the mafia was simplistic. A closer analysis showed that the mafia defeat concerned only its military elements and left political aspects untouched.¹⁰⁸ This explained why the mafia seemed to disappear during the regime, and yet reappeared after the Second World War. As Romano masterfully explained: 'We can affirm that on the whole the result of the operation was to liberate the

¹⁰² Pezzino, *Mafia*, p. 171.

¹⁰³ Duggan, *Fascism*, p. 142. See the Fascist agrarian policy (*battaglia del grano*) which favoured the great land propriety. In this regard see the Parliamentary documents quoted in Nicola Tranfaglia, *Mafia, politica e affari*, Editori Laterza, Bari, 2001, p. 32.

¹⁰⁴ Romano, *Storia della mafia*, p.260.

¹⁰⁵ Duggan, *Fascism*; Catanzaro, *Men of respect*, pp.147-148.

¹⁰⁶ Santino, *Storia*, p. 128.

¹⁰⁷ Mori, *Con la mafia*, p. 84. Quoted in Lupo, 'L'utopia totalitaria', in Aymard, Giarrizzo, *La Sicilia*, p. 410.

¹⁰⁸ Salvatore Lupo, *Storia della mafia*.

“upper mafia”, which had completely joined Fascism, while the new mafia was kept under control and employed a “sleeping” attitude (to use a term from Freemasonry), waiting and reorganising; meanwhile, it entered the Fascist Party, thereby maintaining direct local influence through Party organisations.’¹⁰⁹

Finally, Mori’s campaign was not as efficient as Mussolini had declared in 1927 since crime was still a serious problem in Sicily in the early 1930s.¹¹⁰

3.3. *The Sicilian landing and revival of the mafia*

Contrary to common belief, there are no solid grounds for maintaining that mafia bosses helped the United States organise the Sicilian landing.¹¹¹ Most of the official documents regarding this could not be consulted until recently.¹¹² Michele Pantaleone maintained that Lucky Luciano, one of the most important Sicilian mafia bosses in the US, where he had been imprisoned in the 1930s, played an important role in organising the landing in exchange of his freedom.¹¹³ Others historians found no evidence of any agreement between the mafia and the Allies.¹¹⁴ What is historically certain is that the Allies entrusted some Sicilian town governments to mafia bosses,¹¹⁵ because some were considered anti-Fascists, since Fascism had sent them into forced confinement, and more particularly because they, along with separatist politicians and *agrari*, represented the local ruling power.¹¹⁶

In the aftermath of the Second World War, a secessionist movement, called *Movimento per l’Indipendenza Siciliana*, spread throughout Sicily. At the outset, it was made up of progressive and conservative elements, both expressions of the traditional Sicilian desire for independence. The progressive tendency, represented by men such as Antonio Canepa, flourished in Western Sicily, whereas the conservative wing was in the East.¹¹⁷ According

¹⁰⁹Romano, *Storia della mafia*, p.260.

¹¹⁰Pezzino, *Mafia*, p. 172. Duggan, *Fascism*, p.264.

¹¹¹Orazio Barrese (a cura di), *mafia politica pentiti*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 1992, p. 67.

¹¹²Marino, *Storia della mafia*, p.148.

¹¹³Pantaleone, *Mafia*, pp.62-67.

¹¹⁴Rosario Mangiameli, ‘La regione in guerra’, in Aymard, Giarrizzo, *La Sicilia*, pp. 483-600; Pezzino, *Mafia*, p.186; F. Jr Sonderin, *La mafia oggi*, Bompiani, 1960, p. 115. For the debate on this issue Catanzaro, *Men of Respect*, p.153.

¹¹⁵Barrese, *mafia*, p.67.

¹¹⁶Catanzaro, *Men of Respect*, pp.152-153.

¹¹⁷On the double tendency of the separatism movement see Pantaleone, *Mafia*. Two pamphlets, including the conservative *L’elogio del latifondo siciliano* by Finocchiaro Aprile and *La Sicilia ai siciliani* by Canepa gave a clear idea of the two tendencies. For a critique of the two pamphlets, Mangiameli, ‘La regione’, in Aymard, Giarrizzo, *La Sicilia*, pp. 520-521. See, for instance, the case of mafia boss Calogero Vizzini in Villalba, who joined the MSI, Michele Pantaleone, *A cavallo della tigre*, Flaccovio, Palermo, 1995, pp. 49-59; For a more general explanation, Carlo Maria Marino, *Storia del separatismo siciliano*, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1979, p. 65.

to the Antimafia Commission, some mafiosi, such as Calogero Vizzini, Michele Navarra, and Genco Russo, joined the movement by supporting the right-wing faction, which soon took control over the entire movement.¹¹⁸

Mafia participation in the separatist movement is understandable if we consider it was the only form of political association allowed by the Allied government, and the mafia needed to achieve a sort of political legitimacy. As Paolo Pezzino observed: '(...) separatism offered mafia groups the chance to return to the political arena during a period of democratic transition when links with old references (pre-Fascist nobility) could not be reconstructed, at least during this phase, within the new mass party, which appeared in the political scenario.'¹¹⁹ On the other hand, the Allies opted to support the separatist movement because Northern Italy, still at war, was politically divided between Communism and Fascism.¹²⁰ Indeed, the movement ended when both the Agrarian-mafioso bloc and the Americans no longer needed it. By 1946, the Sicilian region was given a special statute in the new Constitution, enabling it to manage autonomously the resources provided by the central government. Thus, it became more convenient for mafiosi and noble Sicilian landlords to abandon separatism and join new political parties, which would give access to public resources. Americans, after the end of the war, regarded it inopportune to continue supporting the separatist movement because they needed to deal with the new Italian government, especially in order to avoid the spread of Socialist and Communist forces. On the other hand, the progressive faction of the movement was so disappointed it organised riots in cities such as Comiso, Vittoria and Agrigento.¹²¹ These cannot be analysed here in detail. Even many other events concerning separatism, such as the creation of a military force (EVIS), are not treated here since they have little relevance in an outline of the history of the mafia.¹²² What is important to remember in relation to the aftermath of the Second World War is the fact that mafia business relied mostly on black market activities. These allowed mafiosi to play again their traditional roles as mediators.

¹¹⁸This was amply proved by the Antimafia Parlamentar Commission, see the document of the the Commission 'Relazione sui rapporti tra mafia e banditismo in Sicilia' quoted in Tranfaglia, *Mafia, politica*, p. 32. See also Catanzaro, *Men of Respect*, p. 156; Romano, *Storia della mafia*, pp.223-33; Pantaleone, *Mafia*, p. 92 and p.66.

¹¹⁹Pezzino, *Mafia*, p. 189.

¹²⁰For the Italian political situation between the Sicilian landing and the end of the Second World War, see Martin Clark, *Modern Italy 1871-1982*, Longman, London, 1984, pp. 302-326.

¹²¹Crisantino, *Capire*, p. 59.

¹²²For a complete description of these events see the report of the Antimafia Commission quoted in Tranfaglia, *Mafia, politica*, pp. 33-38.

Indeed, as Michele Pantaleone, who lived in Sicily during the period, reported: 'mafiosi have found a more rewarding and safer line of business under the unwitting protection of the Allied authorities - the black market.' Mafiosi by gaining official posts 'managed to get into the best positions for controlling the movement and transport of goods.'¹²³ These allowed them, - see for instance, mafia bosses Vito Genovese and Calogero Vizzini - to begin 'a brisk clandestine traffic in food stuffs which became the biggest black market organisation in the whole of the South.'¹²⁴

Generally speaking, 'as in the period after the Italian battle of unification, the aftermath of World War II was a time of chaotic freedom and economic expansion which the mafia exploited ably.'¹²⁵ Moreover, the consequences of the Second World War awakened the phenomenon of banditry although in a different form from that in the late 19th century.¹²⁶ This time bandits, as we shall soon see, became pawns of conservative political forces in order to defend the *latifondo* system attacked by the peasant movement supported by Socialists and Communists. Therefore, the mafia used bandits against the Socialists and Communists in order to please the Christian Democratic Party that endorsed the United States' policy against Communism worldwide within the international political climate at the outset of the Cold War.¹²⁷ In the next section, we shall deal with the most notorious case of this kind of manipulation, the story of the bandit Salvatore Giuliano, from Montelepre, a small town near Palermo.¹²⁸

In conclusion, despite its silence during Fascism, the mafia eventually showed itself a powerful social and political force as the transition to democracy provided it with new and greater opportunities.¹²⁹

¹²³Pantaleone, *Mafia*, pp. 63-67. What Pantaleone wrote was confirmed by the Antimafia Commission, according to which, for instance, Vincenzo Di Carlo, boss of the Raffadali (West Sicilian little town) was appointed chief of the *Ufficio per la requisizione del grano ed altri cereali*; Michele Navarra, boss of Corleone (little town closed to Palermo) managed the military motor vehicles left by the army, Tranfaglia, *Mafia, politica*, p. 67.

¹²⁴Pantaleone, *Mafia*, p. 63.

¹²⁵Duggan, *Fascism*, p. 271.

¹²⁶Vito Sansone, Gastone Ingrasci, *Sei anni di banditismo in Sicilia*, Edizioni sociali, Milano, 1954.

¹²⁷The historian Giuseppe Carlo Marino sustained that the mafia showed a filo-atlantic function throughout the Cold War. Marino, *Storia*, p. 248 This thesis is sustained also by other historians, including Pezzino, *Mafia*, p.195, and Crisantino, *Capire*, pp. 61-66. See also for this thesis documents of Antimafia Parliamentary commission quoted in Tranfaglia, *Mafia, politica*, p. 36, and the Minority Report, Pio La Torre, *Mafia e potere politico*, Relazione di minoranza, Editori Riuniti, Milano, 1976. For this report see also Santino, *Storia*, p.569, p.218.

¹²⁸On the relationship between banditry, mafia and politics, documents of Antimafia Parliamentary commission quoted in Tranfaglia, *Mafia, politica*, p. 36.

¹²⁹Pantaleone, *Mafia*, p.16.

3.4. *The peasant movement and agrarian reform*

During the post-war period, harsh economic and social conditions in the South gave rise to massive migration and peasant unrests.¹³⁰ The latter took the form of a movement for agrarian reform, raising a traditional rural Southern issue, namely the wide gap between the condition of poor peasants and the great estate owners. As Paul Ginsborg said, 'Too much of the best land was in too few hands and too many people had no land at all.'¹³¹ Activities of the movement, based on the Communist *Camere del Lavoro*, consisted in demonstrations, land occupations and cooperatives, all led by Socialist and Communist politicians and peasant trade unionists.

The first demand of the peasant movement was the implementation of Gullo Land Law. In 1944, Communist Minister of Agriculture Fausto Gullo had passed three decrees authorising peasant co-operatives to occupy poorly cultivated estates and regulating a more just partition of land production.¹³² However these three decrees had not been implemented despite Minister Gullo's persistent requests to Sicilian Prefects.¹³³ According to Umberto Santino, who collected sources from that period: 'They fight for the implementation of a state law, but landlords, *gabelloti*, *campieri*, and investigators ignore that law, and most of the time they in fact ask "Who is this Gullo?" ... And say explicitly that the law is an invention of Communists.'¹³⁴ Given the situation, in 1947 peasants began to riot for a genuine agrarian reform that altered property relationships. Terrorised by the peasant uprising, landowners entrusted the defence of their interests to their *gabelloti*. Moreover, victory by a coalition of Communists and Socialists in the 1947 regional elections increased worries by spreading uncertainties about the results of national elections in 1948.¹³⁵ The mafiosi exploited the situation by moving against the peasant movement and socialist forces, in order to appeal to landowners and the Christian Democratic party, and, at the same time, taking advantage of the mobilisation of property relationships established by agrarian reforms eventually approved by the Sicilian Regional Parliament in 1950. The result was that between 1945 and 1952 nearly fifty trade union leaders and politicians of different parties, mainly socialists and communists, and a great number of peasants were

¹³⁰On the extent of emigration, Santino, *Storia*, p.16.

¹³¹Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, p.122.

¹³²For a detailed explanation of the three Gullo's decrees see *ibid.* p.60, and Santino, *Storia*, pp.144-146.

¹³³*ibid.*, p. 146.

¹³⁴*ibid.*, p.146.

¹³⁵On the electoral campaign in 1947, *ibid.*, p.171.

murdered.¹³⁶ The cruellest and most significant episode was the 'slaughter' at Portella della Ginestra on 1 May 1947 when peasants gathered for celebrating Labour Day. Bandit Salvatore Giuliano 'had been hired by the mafia to remind the peasants who really held power in the province, elections or no elections.'¹³⁷ Eleven peasants were murdered and sixty-five wounded. In 1952, Salvatore Giuliano was killed apparently during a feud between bandits,¹³⁸ just before the celebration of his trial in Viterbo in which Gaspare Pisciotta, Giuliano's cousin, accused several major politicians of being responsible for the Portella della Ginestra massacre. Accused politicians included Christian Democrats Bernardo Mattarella and Mario Scelba, and Monarchists Tommaso Leone Marchesano, Geloso Cusumano and Gianfranco Alliata.¹³⁹ In 1954, Pisciotta was murdered in prison with coffee poisoned with strychnine.¹⁴⁰ Having investigated the events, the Anti-mafia Commission concluded they were the product of close connections between the mafia, banditry and political power.¹⁴¹ Giuliano's band had been exploited by those political forces that did not want to recognise peasant's rights and were afraid of a political victory by the Left.¹⁴²

Beyond performing the above role, some mafia *gabelloti* bought land from their landowners at very low prices since they hastened to sell their properties in anticipation their land would be expropriated.¹⁴³ In addition, other mafia *gabelloti* set up cooperatives in order to exploit the system of agrarian reform. Paolo Pezzino wrote about the clever 'dual' strategy of mafia bosses during the transformation of propriety relationships in the Southern Italian countryside: 'The mafia did not lose its autonomy (...), was not reduced simply to being the armed branch (*braccio armato*) of the *agrari*, but rather instrumentally installed itself at the head of segments of the peasant movement, when it found more advantages there than from unconditionally endorsing the *agrari*.'¹⁴⁴

¹³⁶On the number of murderesses of trade unionists and socialists see AP, Camera dei deputati, VI LEGISLATURA, doc. XXIII, n. 2, CA, Relazione conclusiva (relatore Carraro), Roma, Tipografia del senato, 1976, pp.154-158, partly quoted in Pezzino, *Mafia*, p.189.

¹³⁷Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, p. 112.

¹³⁸On the theory that he was murdered by his cousin Gaspare Pisciotta, see Pezzino, *Mafia*, p.195.

¹³⁹*ibid.*, p. 196.

¹⁴⁰*ibid.* p.196.

¹⁴¹AP Camera dei Deputati, V Legislatura doc. XXIII n. 2 sexies, Relazione sui rapporti tra mafia e banditismo in Sicilia, quoted in Pezzino, *Mafia*, p. 193-

¹⁴²For a list of bandits used for political motivations and then murdered, Panataleone, *Mafia*, pp. 154-155.

¹⁴³Santino, *Storia*, p. 169.

¹⁴⁴Pezzino, *Mafia*, p.188.

Management of the reform was organised by ERAS (*Ente di riforma agraria siciliana*), run by Coldiretti, in turn organised by the Christian Democrats. Remaining only on paper, the aims of the reform were '(...) the expropriation of sections of the great landed estates and their redistribution amongst the peasantry of the region concerned.'¹⁴⁵The 'criteria for expropriation were not uniform' and therefore the reform allowed *gabelloti* to buy the best land cheaply.¹⁴⁶ Since most of the peasants received the worst land, they were compelled to emigrate. As Ginsborg suggested, the reform was used by the Christian Democratic Party to increase consensus among Southern peasants, through a populist and propagandistic presentation of the reform, and the agrarian-mafioso bloc by betraying the progressive principles of the reform.¹⁴⁷

To sum up, social and economic changes between 1945 and 1955 offered mafiosi room to act. This was possible initially because of the support offered by the Allied Government and separatist movement.¹⁴⁸ While during the period of the peasant struggle, the key to their success was based on returning to their traditional role as mediators between the State, landowners and peasants.

Between 1947 and 1950, a mass of mafiosi and agrarians went over to the DC (*Democrazia Cristiana* or Christian Democratic Party), which, as noted above, had attracted many separatists by conceding Sicily partial autonomy.¹⁴⁹ The following gives an idea of the political climate: Pasquale Almerico, secretary of the DC section in Camporale, a small Sicilian village, refused DC membership to the liberal group since it was led by local mafia boss Vanni Sacco. The provincial secretary, Giovanni Gioia, condemned Almerico's decision and after a while Almerico was murdered.¹⁵⁰ On a national level, the Christian Democratic Party 'colonized' the entire republic. As Ginsborg observed,

Unique amongst political parties in Western Europe, the Italian Christian Democrats have remained, ever since 1947, the dominant party in government. The result has been an extraordinary degree of fusion between the Christian Democratic Party and the republican state. Political commentators have used different expressions to describe this phenomenon. (...) All have grasped the essential

¹⁴⁵Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, p. 131.

¹⁴⁶*ibid.*, p.131.

¹⁴⁷*ibid.*, pp.137-140.

¹⁴⁸Pezzino, *Mafia*, p.185.

¹⁴⁹For a list of boss of mafia *cosche* which joined the Christian Democracy party, see La Torre, *Mafia e potere politico*, pp.40-41. See also Relazione Cattanei, in Marino, *Storia della mafia*, p.217.

¹⁵⁰La Torre, *Mafia e potere politico*, p 41; Marino, *Storia della mafia*, p.218.

element of the continuity and permanence of Christian Democrat power, with its inevitable consequences for the relationship between Party and State.¹⁵¹

The above observation permits us to turn to the analysis of the 1950s and 1960s, dominated by corruption resulting from the connection between Christian Democracy and the mafia.

3.5. *The connection between politics and the mafia*

As seen in chapter two, Italy underwent economic, social and cultural changes during the 1950s and '60s that transformed the largely agrarian country into one of the most industrialised Western nations. The so-called 'economic miracle' involved the North more than the South, thus enlarging rather than reducing the historical gap between the two areas of the country. In the South, the consequences of the quick transformation of the Italian economy were strong state intervention and a massive emigration of people to richer areas. The public project was based on the *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno*, a special state fund established in 1950, intended to develop Southern Italy that was considered backward. In short, the market in southern areas developed not because of productive reasons but with aid from the Italian state. The mafia system took advantage of the distribution of state resources, thus discovering a profitable way of accumulating capital. Mafiosi obtained public money thanks to their contacts with political power. As noted above, in 1946 Sicily created its legislative assembly that dealt with all areas of public life including the management of political-administrative, economic and fiscal power. Article 38 of the Sicilian Regional Statutes provides for the Region to receive an enormous sum of money from the State each year through national support funds.¹⁵² Politicians running the administration of the Region, instead of directing the public money to improve the difficult conditions of the region, shared it with mafiosi through public works contracts, licences and import permits. Moreover, many *enti* were established (semi-autonomous bodies financed by the State). Organizations such as the *Ente Riforma Agraria*, *Ente Bonifica*, and *Ente Minerario* were 'empty boxes' used only for patronage purposes. For example, a huge percentage of officers and staff of the *enti* was appointed by '*chiamata diretta*', namely directly by the central government rather than through open competition. This was justified by the fact they needed to recruit personnel quickly. In such a situation, obtaining seats in the Regional Parliament obviously became crucial. Thus, the Christian Democratic Party

¹⁵¹*ibid.*, 153.

¹⁵²Pino Arlacchi, *Mafia Business*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988 (Italian first edition:1983), p.73.

looked for mafia support in order to collect votes.¹⁵³ To reciprocate, politicians made sure mafiosi got concessions on public contracts and licences.

Not surprisingly, from the late 1950s on mafia activity was concentrated in the construction sector that had boomed as a result of post-war reconstruction and urbanisation. The social failure of agrarian reform led many peasants to leave the countryside for the city, which offered more job opportunities. Italian cities needed new infrastructure and, as a result, construction business mushroomed. Mafia interests shifted from the countryside to the city. This did not mean mafiosi had not operated in the city earlier, but from the 1960s onward, urban business became their main activity. Therefore, in addition to their traditional businesses such as extortion, fraud and smuggling tobacco, mafiosi also mediated between political power and building entrepreneurs who paid them to get contract concessions.¹⁵⁴ Chains of connection were created systematically between the mafia, building speculators, entrepreneurs, professionals, and both local and national politicians.¹⁵⁵ The beautiful landscape of Southern Italy was destroyed by unregulated building due to government corruption. Cement ruined stunning scenery. The case of Southern Italy was not isolated, as the destruction of the environment has been a feature of many landscapes outside Italy as well; however, in the South this speculation became a prerogative of the mafia system. An emblematic example was that of Palermo, which doubled in population from 1861 to 1921 and trebled between 1961 and 1970. The building development during the 1960s, meaningfully called '*Il sacco di Palermo*' (The plunder of Palermo)¹⁵⁶ by the media, was carried out by V.A.L.I.GIO.¹⁵⁷, a name coined by media to indicate the surnames of building entrepreneurs Francesco Vassallo, and Christian Democrat administrators Salvatore Lima and Giovanni Gioia.¹⁵⁸ Vito Ciancimino,

¹⁵³The so-called *voto di scambio* not only was accounted by reliable *pentiti*, such as Tommaso Buscetta and Giocchino Pennino, but also was proved at judiciary level. Marino, *Storia della mafia*, p.219. Santino, *Storia*, p. 215. Raimondo Catanzaro in a remarkable and well documented work explained how that system worked, Raimondo Catanzaro (a cura di), *Società, Politica e Cultura nel Mezzogiorno*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 1989.

¹⁵⁴Pantaleone, *Mafia*.

¹⁵⁵Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents*, p.203.

¹⁵⁶For a complete explanation of the *sacco di Palermo* see John Dickie, *Cosa Nostra*, pp. 277-288.

¹⁵⁷This journalistic word was also used by official reports, see for instance Minority Report, La Torre, *Mafia, politica*, p. 63.

¹⁵⁸For a well documented synthesis of Lima's story, Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents*, p.204. On Francesco Vassallo, see Santino, La Fiura, *L'impresa mafiosa*, pp.128-. On the administration of Palermo see AP, Camera dei deputati, CA, DA, vol.IV; tomi VI-X (VIII legislatura, Doc. XXIII, nn. 1-1/IV) quoted in Pezzino, *Mafia*, pp.208-210. For the connection between mafia and political power see *Relazione sulle risultanze acquisite sul comune di Palermo* AP, V LEGISLATURA, Doc. XXIII, n. 2-ter, CA, Roma, Tipografia del senato della Repubblica, 1971, pp. 15-17. In the two pages (plus twenty attachments) report

entrepreneur and Christian Democratic politician (administrator of public contracts in the 1960s)¹⁵⁹ also took part in this 'sacco' by awarding public contracts to mafiosi or mafia figureheads.¹⁶⁰ In 1984, Ciancimino was accused and in 1992 charged with mafia association.

To sum up, during the 1950s and '60s, urbanisation and State intervention led to a rapid development of the real estate business, run by politicians and mafiosi. The great quantity of money made from that business enabled mafiosi to accumulate a lot of capital to be invested in the drug trade that was now becoming increasingly fruitful. This did not mean that they left behind previous illegal activities, including extortion and public contracts. These in fact remained profitable in terms of money and particularly in terms of control over the territory.

The Italian socio-cultural transformations of the 'economic miracle' obviously partly affected even the life of mafiosi. This is not to say, as Pino Arlacchi did, that mafiosi of the sixties were more violent compared to traditional ones, and their values switched from honour to wealth.¹⁶¹ However, the consumerist Italian society which emerged from the economic miracle and the mafia's great accumulation of wealth through new illegal traffics, were two interrelated factors in contributing to change mafiosi's mentality, leading them to a growing desire to show off their own wealth through consumerist material goods. In this sense, Arlacchi's description of the new style of mafiosi was correct as far as 'wealth became the most readily recognised proof of success'¹⁶² As we will see in the course of this study, these changing social values would also affect the condition of women in the mafia.

3.6. *The first mafia war and the antimafia commission*

During the 1950s and '60s, the mafia became involved in new and larger businesses including drugs. This kind of new business created new requirements such as coordinating bodies. As suggested by American mafiosi, Sicilian Families set up a commission, called the *Cupola*, composed of representatives from the various Sicilian provinces. According to

presented to the Chambers of Parliament on 8th July of 1965, it was admitted the connection between the public administration and the mafia, although that was labelled merely as '*irregolarità amministrative*'.

¹⁵⁹For detailed references of Ciancimino's political career, including data, see Tranfaglia, *Mafia, politica*, p. 118.

¹⁶⁰On Ciancimino's activities, see Antimafia Commission Report, 1976, in *ibid.*, pp. 103-143.

¹⁶¹On this thesis see Arlacchi, *Mafia Business*, p. 58.

¹⁶²*ibid.*, p.60.

the Parliamentary antimafia commission¹⁶³ and official American reports, the mafia commission was established during a meeting between American bosses, such as Joe Bonanno and Frank Coppola, and Sicilian bosses, such as Genco Russo and Vincenzo Rimi, at the Hotel 'Delle Palme' in Palermo on 12 October 1957.¹⁶⁴ By then, the mafia employed the name Cosa Nostra that had previously been attributed only to the American mafia.

Despite the establishment of a coordinating body, a climate of warfare reigned among mafia *cosche* between the late 1950s and early 1960s. Increasing economic competition due to drug trafficking ended the peaceful division of illegal markets. This mafia warfare concerned particularly Corleone (a small town near Palermo) and Palermo, the heart of mafia Families and the oldest mafia settlement.¹⁶⁵

In Corleone, the boss of the main mafia Family, Michele Navarra, director of the local hospital and head of the local DC chapter, was murdered in 1958 by Luciano Leggio, known as Liggio, who consequently became the *capo mafia* of Corleone.¹⁶⁶ The two main members of Liggio's faction were Totò Riina and Bernardo Provenzano who would become protagonists in later developments in mafia history.¹⁶⁷ Liggio did not come from a mafia family and his career as a self-made mafioso constitutes an enlightening example of the Sicilian mafia's system of promotion that was not just based on hereditary criteria but also on merits in the ability to use violence.

In 1963, Palermo mafia Families, who shared sixteen territories in the city, began disagreeing about the establishment of boundaries for their respective dominions. Warfare developed between the Greco family of Ciaculli, in West Palermo and the La Barbera family, led by two brothers from humble origins. A great number of murders were committed on both sides between 1961 and 1963. The last act of this feud was the explosion, in Ciaculli territory, of a car bomb that was meant to strike the Greco gang but instead killed seven *carabinieri*. This event forced the Italian authorities to face the matter and a parliamentary commission was set up in 1963. Although the Political Left had been

¹⁶³Commissione Parlamentare d'inchiesta sul fenomeno della mafia (legge 20 dicembre 1962, n.1720), *Relazione sul traffico mafioso di tabacchi e stupefacenti nonché sui rapporti tra mafia e gangsterismo italo-americano* (relatore senatore M.Zuccalà), VI legislatura, doc.XXIII, n. 2, Roma 1976, pp.283-91, in Tranfaglia, *Mafia, politica*, p.160.

¹⁶⁴Unlike Tommaso Buscetta many informers accounted this meeting. For details on the meeting, Alfio Caruso, *Da cosa nasce cosa*, Longanesi, Milano, 2000, pp.92-98.

¹⁶⁵Pantaleone, *Mafia e droga*, Einaudi, Torino, 1966.

¹⁶⁶Marino, *Storia della mafia*, p.214.

¹⁶⁷For details on the 'first mafia warfare', Caruso, *Da cosa*, pp.146-1963.

asking for a parliamentary inquiry since 1948, it had always been opposed by the Christian Democrats¹⁶⁸ and regarded by the Minister of the Interior Mario Scelba as shameful, anti-Sicilian propaganda; according to him, the mafia was not as serious a phenomenon as Communists, such as Girolamo Li Causi, imagined.¹⁶⁹

The Antimafia Parliamentary Commission studied the origins and nature of the mafia, looked at those economic sectors in which it operated and proposed measures to eliminate the organisation. In 1965, Donato Pafundi, first president of the Commission, stated that the public *Enti* were infiltrated with mafia elements and anticipated that 'the archive of the Commission was like a powder keg.'¹⁷⁰ Yet, in his final report of only three pages, Pafundi was prudently generic and avoided making public the reports of the investigations.¹⁷¹ The Commission, however, suggested special measures; some of these, such as the *misura di prevenzione*, including *vigilanza speciale* (special surveillance) and the *soggiorno obbligato cautelativo* (a sort of internal exile compelling suspected mafiosi to reside in Central and Northern Italy) were adopted by the government, and later became law (No.575) on 31 May 1965.¹⁷² Preventive measures were applied to people who had not been convicted but were seriously suspected, based on large quantities of circumstantial evidence.¹⁷³ The *soggiorno obbligato cautelativo* helped temporarily stop the bloodshed. However, it spread the mafia into the North through the exile of some mafiosi. Other proposals, such as coordination between different police forces and magistrates, reform of public sector contracts, and financial investigation measures, remained only on paper.¹⁷⁴

Francesco Cattanei, president of the Parliamentary Commission between 1968 and 1972, made inroads towards a concrete understanding of the mafia. Along with his collaborators, including Girolamo Li Causi, he carried out noteworthy investigation on Liggio, the administration of the City of Palermo, the wholesale markets of Palermo, and the relationship between the mafia and banditry. But more than this, Cattanei declared that

¹⁶⁸For the numerous negations of the Christian Democracy government to the Communist requests, Tranfaglia, *Mafia, politica*, pp.5-13.

¹⁶⁹See the Parliamentary debate quoted in Tranfaglia, *Mafia, politica*, pp. 9-10. On Mario Scelba's ostruzionism to the antimafia commission, see Marino, *Storia della mafia*, p. 245. Orazio Barrese quoted the speech in which Scelba reduced the mafia to a folkloristic phenomenon, Barrese, *I Complici. Gli anni dell'antimafia*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1973, p.7.

¹⁷⁰Santino, *Storia*, p.211.

¹⁷¹*ibid.*, p.211.

¹⁷²Colombo, Magistro, *La legislazione antimafia*, pp.51-111; Tranfaglia, *Mafia, politica*, p.14.

¹⁷³These measures were not a breach of human rights, because they requested a mass of evidence. In this regards, see Gaetano De Leo, Marco Strano, Giancarlo Pezzuto, Luigi Ciro De Lisi, *Evoluzione mafiosa e tecnologie criminali*, Giuffrè Editore, Milano, 1995, pp. 122-124.

¹⁷⁴Santino, *Storia*, p.217.

the election of Ciancimino as Mayor of Palermo was a scandal due to his involvement in the '*sacco di Palermo*'. Eventually, Ciancimino's connection with the mafia became such common knowledge he was compelled to resign.¹⁷⁵ Unfortunately, his party did not appreciate Cattanei's challenging work and therefore replaced him with Luigi Carraro.¹⁷⁶ Was his inquiry considered a threat? This has yet to be investigated. In 1976, the report of Carraro's Commission demonstrated it had either investigated very little or depicted reality in a stereotypical way, far from offering any contribution to further awareness of the phenomenon. As stressed by the political opposition, namely the Communists, and by mafia experts, the report underestimated the relationships between the mafia and political power.¹⁷⁷ Two Minority Reports, produced by the Communist party and the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (the far right wing party), shed light on this relationship thus contributing to understanding one of the main characteristics of the mafia system.¹⁷⁸ Finally, the Commission concluded its investigation since public concern in the historical context of the 1970s was concentrated on terrorism, which had replaced the mafia as the greatest social problem.

3.7. *The drug trade*

In the late 1960s, mafia Families and their coordinating body apparently went through a period of fragmentation due to the special measures and investigations carried out by Judge Cesare Terranova. However, the rulings of the trials in Bari and Catanzaro, subsequent to Terranova's accusations, acquitted many mafia bosses.¹⁷⁹ Terranova's hard work had all been in vain and the mafia used its influence and power to intimidate the court.¹⁸⁰

Moreover, in the early 1970s, mafia interest in the drug trade was progressing into systematic involvement. Until then, mafia Families had dealt little in drug trafficking, which was partially motivated by the return of several American mafiosi to Southern Italy.

¹⁷⁵Tranfaglia, *Mafia, politica*, pp. 103-143.

¹⁷⁶*ibid.*, p.20.

¹⁷⁷Santino analyses the majority report in details, and explained how it neglected the relationship between politics and the mafia, Santino, *Storia*, pp.214-215. On this question see also Pezzino, *Mafia*, p.237.

¹⁷⁸The MSI's Report dwelled on the role played by Salvo Lima. La Torre, *Mafia, politica*. The Communist Minority Report is to be found in Nicola Tranfaglia, *Mafia, politica e affari. 1943-91*, Laterza, Bari, 1992, pp. 190-245. The MSI's Report dwelled on the role played by Salvo Lima.

¹⁷⁹See John Dickie, *Cosa Nostra*, pp. 325-326.

¹⁸⁰This was later demonstrated at judicially level. Marino, *Storia della mafia*, p.245.

But its interest was still low since Italy remained only a transit area for drugs until the 1970s when it also became a drug market.¹⁸¹

Initially, Sicilian mafia Families (including those of Genco Russo, Angelo La Barbera, Tommaso Buscetta and Gaetano Badalamenti) had worked with criminals from Marseilles who refined Turkish morphine into heroin. Sicilian traffickers shipped the finished product to the US where the market showed increasing demand and where in addition they benefited from numerous ties with American mafiosi of Sicilian origin.¹⁸² Afterwards, some mafiosi learnt refining techniques from the French and clandestine laboratories sprang up in the Sicilian countryside. Proceeds from the real-estate business enabled mafia Families to purchase raw material in southwest Asia (the Golden Crescent of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Turkey).¹⁸³ Thereby, Sicilians replaced the French as leaders in refining and shipping drugs. Three features made the mafia competitive in the drug trade: the availability of capital, the readiness to use violence and the capacity to ensure police inaction.

The organisation of drug transport by Sicilian Families was based on those routes previously used for trafficking traditional mafia commodities such as citrus fruit and tobacco.¹⁸⁴ Yet, the drug trade showed risks unknown in traditional trade.¹⁸⁵ In fact, the numerous stages from production to distribution made the environment surrounding the drug trade uncertain. Risks increased with the growth in the amount of money to be invested in drug trafficking and when the geographical extension of the market led to employing increasing numbers of people of various origins. As the *pentito* Antonino Calderone explained: 'There were not only men of honour involved in drug trafficking. (...) Some people transported it, others refined it; there was a tangle of people because there were billions at stake. Thus, if someone was not a man of honour, it did not matter; he too could enter.'¹⁸⁶ The necessity of recruiting from among 'people and facilities outside the original family' led to 'leaks in the secrecy surrounding the operation and [gave] rise to growing irregularities in the group's internal accounting.'¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, due to the nature

¹⁸¹For a list of police anti narcotic traffic operations since the late 1940s, Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia*, pp. 234-235.

¹⁸²Vincenzo Ruggiero, *Crime and Markets. Essays in Anti-criminology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001, p.20.

¹⁸³Francesco Mannoia was one of the most important refiners, Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia*, p.241.

¹⁸⁴Crisantino, *Capire*, pp. 111.

¹⁸⁵Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia*, p. 236.

¹⁸⁶*ibid.*, p.239.

¹⁸⁷Arlacchi, *Mafia Business*, p. 202.

of the trade and geographical scope of the drug economy, 'petty, disorganised, and opportunistic offences [could] no longer be controlled or regulated, as they [became] an important component of organised crime itself.'¹⁸⁸ Therefore, in order to contain centrifugal forces, the 'management' of the organisation adopted a rational division of labour within the group, whose members had to take on specific tasks and possess specific skills. They attempted as much as possible to find '(...) people who [respected] agreements, who would not make off with enormously valuable goods and capital in situations where it would be very easy to do so, and who would reveal nothing to the authorities if captured (...)'.¹⁸⁹

The pivotal change in recruitment had an impact on the participation of women, because they could now enter the mafia market labour force. Mafia Families began to employ 'their' women in drug trafficking because, although outsiders in the criminal groups since they previously had not been engaged actively in mafia trafficking, they were still trustworthy members of blood mafia families. However, female involvement in the drug trade entailed not only women from inside the mafia but also those from outside since their sex placed them beyond suspicion.

Finally, the enormous enrichment of mafia Families due to the expansion of narcotics trafficking led to dangerous fragmentation and thus destabilisation of the organisation. To contain this tendency, mafia bosses tried to centralise the organisation, as the next section will explain.¹⁹⁰

3.8. *The second mafia war and new mafia strategy*

After the brief period of instability in the late 1960s following the exile of many important bosses to Northern Italy, Cosa Nostra began flourishing again in the 1970s.¹⁹¹ In 1973, Stefano Bontade and Gaetano Badalamenti, representatives of the Palermo families, and Totò Riina, representative of the Corleone family,¹⁹² set up a triumvirate, leading once again to the constitution of a provincial commission, the *Cupola*. This central body set strict rules to prevent Families from making important decisions, such as murdering a public official, without first consulting Cupola members.¹⁹³ In other words, in the early

¹⁸⁸Ruggiero, *Crime and Markets*, p. 19.

¹⁸⁹Arlacchi, *Mafia Business*, p. 201.

¹⁹⁰Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents*, p.199.

¹⁹¹See Buscetta's testimony, Pino Arlacchi, *Addio Cosa Nostra*, Rizzoli, Milano, 1994, pp. 142-143.

¹⁹²Marino, *Storia della mafia*, p. 250.

¹⁹³Lupo, *Storia della mafia*, p. 237.

1970s Cosa Nostra changed from a well coordinated federation of Families, based on common rules and strategies, to a central, hierarchical structure.¹⁹⁴

Drug trafficking required more money to be invested and rendered profits from the real estate business insufficient. This encouraged the Corleonesi to enter into the crime of kidnapping. However, the Cupola had banned such criminal activity since key alliances would have been ruined with politicians, entrepreneurs, magistrates and sections of those social groups that supported and colluded with the mafia, thus damaging the equilibrium between mafia, business and politics in Palermo. In spite of this, given the fact that those leaders who considered kidnapping counterproductive (Gaetano Badalamenti and Stefano Bontate) were in prison at that time, the Corleonesi started kidnapping wealthy people.¹⁹⁵ Moreover, in 1971 the first murder was committed of a representative of a state institution, the Chief Prosecutor of Palermo, Pietro Scaglione. In the early 1980s, the Corleonesi's challenge to the rules of the Cupola intensified and competition resulting from the sudden increase in wealth destroyed the balance between mafia Families.¹⁹⁶

Corleonesi's boss Totò Riina began to build his power by boundless use of violence and the art of introducing spies and allies into other Families. Gradually, many Families from other areas (Trapani, Palermo, San Giuseppe Jato, Partinico, Mazara del Vallo) joined Riina's ranks. The rest of the mafia commission, worried about Riina's increasing power, held secret meetings that were spied on by Riina's ally, boss Michele Greco, nicknamed 'the Pope'. Many *pentiti* described Riina as a clever man who was able to pit commission members against each other. In early 1979, Stefano Bontate, understanding the great danger in Riina's cunning methods, ordered the killing of two of Riina's lieutenants and Riina himself who however was warned by Michele Greco, and went on the run. These events were the seeds of the second mafia war, which took place in Palermo between 1981 and 1983, when the rank and file of the Palermo Families clashed with those from Corleone. In the course of the feud around 600 'people lost their lives in what became an unstoppable slaughter.'¹⁹⁷

As a consequence of the conflict, the compact mafia structure started to weaken, giving criminal investigations more room for action. At the same time, many representatives of

¹⁹⁴Marino, *Storia della mafia*, p.252.

¹⁹⁵See, for instance, the kidnapping of Nino Salvo's father in law, Luigi Corleo, which was condemned by Palermo Families because the Salvo cousins were their fundamental link with political power.

¹⁹⁶Santino, *Storia*, p.247.

¹⁹⁷Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents*, p. 200.

state institutions were murdered because of their commitment against the mafia. These included Boris Giuliano, investigating the drugs and money route between Palermo and New York, and Cesare Terranova, a former member of the antimafia commission, killed on 25 September 1979 on becoming head of the Investigative Office of the Palermo Court. Two Christian Democrats, Michele Reina and Piersanti Mattarella, President of the Region of Sicily, who had attempted to clean up methods of obtaining public contracts, were murdered in 1980; Emanuele Basile was assassinated in May 1980 because he had tried to carry on Boris Giuliano's investigation of transatlantic drug trafficking by the Spatola, Inzerillo, Di Maggio and Gambino families. Public Prosecutor Gaetano Costa, who had taken Terranova's place, issued arrest warrants against these families and was murdered on 6 August 1980. In 1982, Pio La Torre, the Communist member of the antimafia commission who implemented an important antimafia law mentioned above, was assassinated. Carabinieri General Carlo Alberto dalla Chiesa was killed on 3 September 1982, only few months after his arrival in Palermo.¹⁹⁸ Head of the investigative office, Rocco Chinnici, who had filled the vacancy left by the murder of Costa, and magistrate Ciccio Montalto, who was investigating the Trapani mafia, were both killed in 1983. Police officers Giuseppe Montana and Ninni Cassarà, who had carried out effective investigations against the mafia, were also killed. The above list includes only appointed or elected public officials, but it is important to remember that journalists, politicians, entrepreneurs and others also died fighting against the mafia.

Investigations leading to the 1986 'maxi-trial' in Palermo revealed the reasons and dynamics of the second mafia war. The starting point of the broad criminal inquiry carried out by judge Giovanni Falcone was the reconstruction of the Spatola family's huge drug traffic.¹⁹⁹ Simultaneously, judge Paolo Borsellino was inquiring into the murder of police captain Basile, while tracing the activities of the Corleonesi. By linking the two cases, the two judges discovered that mafia warfare was taking place and the Corleonesi were winning. Falcone and Borsellino's investigations relied on a scientific approach, which involved bank and travel records, seized heroin shipments, fingerprint and handwriting analysis, and wiretapped phone conversations.²⁰⁰ Moreover, Falcone understood that the Sicilian mafia was part of an international trafficking network and established contacts

¹⁹⁸Nando dalla Chiesa, *Il potere mafioso*, Mazzotta, Milano, 1976.

¹⁹⁹Marcelle Padovani, Giovanni Falcone, *Cose di Cosa nostra*, Rizzoli, Milano, 1991.

²⁰⁰Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents*, p. 208.

with foreign investigators. Such methods were considered innovative, particularly concerning banking records, since until then the Italian judiciary had been unlikely to start in-depth investigations concerning criminal responsibilities at the political or financial level.²⁰¹ What is worth underlining is the fact that Falcone and Borsellino were able to investigate secret criminal associations even before getting information by extracting confessions from *pentiti*. The two magistrates were also helped by the Rognoni-La Torre law, approved by the Italian parliament in 1982, which introduced the crime of association for criminal purposes of a specifically mafia nature into the Italian penal code.²⁰² In other words, being member of a mafia association was now considered a crime, whether or not one had committed any particular offence.²⁰³ Moreover, the law gave magistrates the power to overcome bank secrecy, enabling them to investigate the financial aspects of mafia activities. Crucial to the effectiveness of investigations was cooperation between magistrates, allowing them to understand that mafia clans were part of a larger organisation. This coordination began spontaneously with simple conversations and discussions between Falcone and Borsellino who little by little discovered they were dealing with branches of the same organisation. Rocco Chinnici, head of the criminal investigation section of the Palermo Court, encouraged this method.²⁰⁴ Afterwards, his substitute, Antonino Caponnetto, created and led a team dealing only with mafia cases.²⁰⁵

The discovery of a broad, structured organisation, confirmed by the testimony of Tommaso Buscetta, enabled the Palermo Antimafia team to put many Cosa Nostra members on trial, from the lowest levels to the Boss. Eventually, 'the pool prepared arrest warrants for hundreds of people Buscetta had identified, pulling up old case files and police records to gather supporting evidence for the arrests.'²⁰⁶ Most of the 366 defendants were captured and, in 1986, the so-called 'maxi-trial' began in a 'bunker courtroom' set up just for the occasion. Journalists from around the world went to Palermo to observe the trial.²⁰⁷ On 16 December 1987, verdicts from the 'maxi-trial' found 114 defendants not

²⁰¹For a well documented and detailed history of how Italian magistrature has tackled the mafia since 1945, Di Lello, *Giudici*.

²⁰²Colombo, Magistro, *La legislazione antimafia*, pp.111-152.

²⁰³Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents*, p. 207.

²⁰⁴Alexander Stille, *Excellent Cadavers: the Mafia and the Death of the First Italian Republic*, Vintage, London, 1996, p. 81.

²⁰⁵Antonio Caponnetto, *I miei giorni a Palermo. Storie di mafia e di giustizia raccontate a Saverio Lodato*, Giuffrè Milano, 1992. Stille, *Excellent Cadavers*, p.89.

²⁰⁶*ibid.*, p.124.

²⁰⁷Corrado Staiano, *Mafia. L'atto d'accusa dei giudici di Palermo*, Editori Riuniti, Milano, 1986.

guilty and 344 defendants guilty (with sentences totalling 2,655 years in prison).²⁰⁸ Despite this legal victory over the mafia, political power did not support judicial action. The head of the criminal investigations resigned his position and yet Falcone could not replace him since he was too young (career advancements in the Italian judicial system are based on age, not merit). The new head of the office, Antonino Meli, did not continue the team's method of work. On the contrary, he entrusted members of the team with small cases instead of large investigations.²⁰⁹ Before this fragmentation, Falcone had carried out 160 arrests throughout Sicily thanks to new revelations from *pentito* Antonio Calderone who had shed light on the relationships between the Catania and Palermo clans and the murder of Prefect Carlo Alberto dalla Chiesa. However, the great season of the Palermo investigations ended after the 'maxi-trial.'

3.9. *Recent mafia developments*

Accounts of recent events do not go beyond a short report and contemporary information is unlikely to be supported by historical evidence, a part from judicial one. However, attention must be given to them since the latest developments in mafia activities have been crucial to the growth of women's involvement in the organisation. Over the course of the late 1980s and 1990s, the mafia showed signs of vulnerability due partially to the 'maxi-trial' and the loss of political protection.²¹⁰ The latter was caused by the grave crisis undergone by major Italian political parties as a result of what the media called the 'collapse of the First Republic,' followed by criminal investigations by the Milan Public Prosecutor's Office into the corrupt system of public contract management.²¹¹ For the first time, magistrates gained strong support from civil society in demonstrating that politicians could be charged. This climate favouring legality stimulated the government to improve its operations against organised crime. The most important sign of the state's antimafia concern was the appointment of Giovanni Falcone as 'Director of Penal Affairs', an important office at the Ministry of Justice. The mafia was obviously not pleased with this environment and decided to show its power by organising a series of murders of people, including judges and businessmen, deeply involved in the struggle against it. Among these

²⁰⁸Stille, *Excellent Cadavers*, p.210.

²⁰⁹*ibid.*, pp. 212-227.

²¹⁰Lupo, *Storia della mafia*, p.260.

²¹¹For a description of how this system worked, namely how politicians were able to extract illegal payment from firms, see Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents*, pp. 181-182. According to Marino the mafia lost, after the fall of the Berlin wall, its conservative function against the Left.

were Public Prosecutors Rosario Livatino²¹² and Antonio Scoppellitti, and businessman Libero Grassi. In addition, in 1992, when the verdict of the Supreme Court confirmed the previous decisions of the 'maxi-trial', Christian Democrat Salvo Lima was murdered because he failed to guarantee mafiosi impunity.

Furthermore, as the government proved capable of arresting important bosses, such as Salvatore Madonia and Leonardo Messina, Cosa Nostra's strategy of terror continued by murdering Giovanni Falcone on 23 May 1992, and Paolo Borsellino on 19 July, only two months later. These magistrates were not only symbols of the antimafia struggle, but also caretakers of immense knowledge concerning Cosa Nostra. The Falcone and Borsellino murders stunned the entire country and incurred both the massive indignation of the Italian people, resulting in marches and protests, and state reaction leading to harsh legislative measures. To have an idea of the climate, it pays to remember the Italian government sent military troops to Sicily.

An account of the sophisticated investigative techniques adopted and the legislation implemented in the early 1990s would take us far away from the scope of this thesis. The mention is important here of two main pieces of legislation against the mafia: the witness protection program and Article 41 bis related to maximum-security prisons. The combination of the two proved particularly effective. Indeed, prison conditions required by Article 41 bis were so harsh they often led some mafiosi to collaborate with justice. At the same time, the decision to collaborate was also encouraged by the many benefits and guarantees provided by the witness protection program.²¹³ One good example of the decision to collaborate because of hard prison life was that of Vittorio Foschini, who told me that being isolated for one year compelled him to call Public Prosecutor Armando Spataro and tell him he wanted to turn state's evidence.²¹⁴ As we will see in the final chapter concerning *pentitismo*, the number of people turning state's evidence became so large that the Italian state had to make improvements in protecting them.²¹⁵ Thanks to testimonies by *pentiti*, many mafia bosses, such as Totò Riina, were imprisoned and others went underground. This contributed to creating a power vacuum, often filled by women, as we will see later.

²¹²For the story of Livatino see Nando dalla Chiesa, *Il giudice ragazzino*, Einaudi, Torino, 1992.

²¹³Maurizio Romanelli, *I collaboratori di giustizia. L'esperienza italiana*, Verlag Ruegger, Zurigo, 2003, p.362.

Mario Portanova, Gianpiero Rossi, Andrea Stefanoni, *Mafia a Milano*, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1998, p. 224.

²¹⁴Interview with Vittorio Foschini, Modena, 4 May 2004.

²¹⁵Salvatore D'Amico, *Il collaboratore della giustizia*, Laurus Robuffo, Roma, 1995.

The implementation of Article 41 bis marked an important turning point in the history of the use of women in the mafia. The emergency for mafia bosses came not because they were in prison but because they were prevented from communicating with their fellows outside. In the past, mafiosi had not only kept running their clans from prison but also managed to conduct a luxurious lifestyle. Suffice it to say that in the 1980s Palermo's *Ucciardone* prison was given the nickname '*Grand Hotel Ucciardone*' since it was common for bosses to have gourmet dinners of fish and champagne. The *carcere duro* (harsh imprisonment or 'hard time') established in the early 1990s, roused discussions among politicians; some considered it a sort of breach of human rights. Debate decreased when the *Corte Costituzionale* (Constitutional Court) ruled that mafiosi could be jailed under 41 bis as long as this measure did not become an instrument of torture. As a consequence of this, Parliament added some modifications such as the right to a small kitchen in the cell, to meet with relatives twice a month rather than once, receive a package of clothes and food twice a month, write to relatives, and have physical contact with children under ten-years old.²¹⁶

As a consequence of the emergency situation created by Article 41 bis, women became very important in helping men communicate and continue to run their activities, as we will examine later. This emergency lasted until the late 1990s when changes in the witness laws discouraged people from collaborating with the law, and some restrictions in Article 41bis were eliminated. Moreover, politics showed a lack of interest in facing the mafia question. As a result, the most recent mafia history has witnessed the emergence of Bernardo Provenzano's structural model, which will be describe in chapter five in order to explore its implications for female involvement.²¹⁷

In concluding this chapter, mafia development over the last twenty years should be mentioned in terms of its financial modernisation. As the result of the need to refine financial money laundering techniques, the criminal organisation has begun resembling a business structure. The activity of recycling illegal profits has always been a constant necessity for the mafia;²¹⁸ yet in recent years the enormous wealth accumulated through narcotic and arms trafficking required sophisticated methods of money laundering.²¹⁹ The

²¹⁶ *Giornale di Sicilia*, 27 giugno 1998.

²¹⁷ For a detailed reconstruction of the last ten years see Enrico Bellavia, Salvo Palazzolo, *Voglia di Mafia*, Carocci, Roma, 2004.

²¹⁸ Catanzaro, *Men of Respect*, p. 249.

²¹⁹ De Leo, Strano, Pezzuto, De Lisi, *Evoluzione mafiosa*, pp. 107-117.

organisation has shown increasingly advanced financial tools, subsequent to rapid, contemporary technological developments. Once again, this transformation has opened up new job opportunities for women in mafia businesses, since mafia crimes related to money laundering created jobs suitable for female attitudes toward crime.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Traditional Role of Women in the Mafia

Introduction

Having provided the reader with a general frame of reference, we now move to an analysis of the traditional role of women in the mafia. This consists of two active functions, transmitting mafia values and encouraging *vendetta*, and two passive ones, being a means for men to obtain honour, and becoming 'objects' in strategically arranged marriages. Distinct moments in the development of this traditional role are almost impossible to discern since it has to do with universal concepts, such as mothering, and folk customs, such as *vendetta*. Generally speaking, however, it can be stated that the traditional role was more accentuated in the past and in rural areas than in modern times and in an urban context.

All four functions composing the traditional role are interrelated and have to do with the values underlying mafia culture, violent versions of those values peculiar to the traditional Southern Italian culture, namely the conspiracy of silence, the law of the *vendetta* and the code of honour and shame. Such values were shared with other cultures, including those of the Mediterranean area. It is beyond the purpose of this work to assess to what extent these values were peculiar to Southern Italian culture. What is important to stress is that the mafia manipulates these traditional values in order to justify violent deeds, thus creating consensus and avoiding condemnation in the community. Underlying the instrumental use of traditional institutions and codes, such as the *vendetta* and honour, does not underplay their ideological nature, which had an onerous impact on women. However, the manipulation of traditional popular values, which all sections of this chapter will examine in detail, is fundamental in order to understand the relationship between Southern Italian culture and the mafia. Identifying differences and similarities between the two will offer the opportunity to untangle the difficult debate on the nature of the mafia, already analysed in chapter two, by employing a balanced approach between culturalist and criminal

interpretations.¹In this regard, the traditional role of women is an example of participating in the mafia system without, at the same time, being liable for any crimes. Obviously women cannot be sentenced for crying for a vendetta or transmitting violent mafia principles. However, the criminal organisation would not survive without the transmission and enhancement of its underlying culture. Therefore a study of women and the mafia points out the importance of cultural aspects in the criminal organisation often neglected by scholars who tended more to concentrate solely on the criminal structure of the mafia.

Finally, it is important to remember that for a long time women have exclusively been attributed a traditional role, thus overlooking their active participation in mafia criminal activities. Therefore, focussing on the traditional role has led observers to label women as playing a mere supportive role, linked to the domestic realm. As we will see in chapter five, the mafia has exploited this prejudice by using women for many tasks where they were less likely to be checked by the police.

4.1. *Active function: transmitting mafia values*

As mothers, women play an active role within the mafia system by handing down mafia values through generations. As this function is connected with the universal category of mothering, we might assume it has existed since the mafia's outset. Observing this, however, does not imply that the role of the mother does not change over time.²

Since the function of mothering is performed in the private sphere, one or two observations would be useful here on the Italian family, particularly given the fact a linguistic association exists between the family and the mafia. Indeed, the terminology identifying the mafia structure and its members resembles that of the natural family. The *cosca* is called a 'Family'; mafia members are called 'brothers'; powerful mafia leaders are known as *padrini*, 'godfathers'; the mafia Boss is *mammasantissima*, 'holy mother'; a politician who helps the clan is called *zio*, 'uncle'; and women in the 'Ndrangheta who help the organisation are occasionally called *sorella d'omertà*, 'sister of the conspiracy of

¹The debate has been addressed in the second chapter of this thesis. For a clear explanation of the two positions, Rocco Sciarone, *Mafie vecchie*, pp. 3-9.

²We agree, in fact, with historian Giovanna Fiume who offers us a beautiful definition of motherhood: 'motherhood is far from being a monolithic representation corresponding to univocal social practices; instead, it appears as a kaleidoscopic image made up of single parts in which new arrangements from time to time change the entire figure', Giovanna Fiume (a cura di), *Madri. Storia di un ruolo sociale*, Marsilio, Venezia, 1995, p.10.

silence.’³This linguistic association might intend to create a system influenced by hierarchy and subordination as in traditional family relationships. As we know, the allegory of the family is used in organisations such as factories in order to create a condition of subordination, as it involves the idea of belonging. Using family terminology may also serve to create a positive model by associating the criminal group with an institution, such as the family, that in Italian culture is of great importance. This connection allows mafia members to devote themselves to the criminal clan and neglect natural family relationships when the two do not overlap.⁴In this case,

the mafia family takes the place of the blood family by reproducing its codes and basic mental structures; its aim is to become the mental organisation of the life of the subject and his relationship with his own unconscious and the world. In this sense, the willingness to break the law would become not a tendency toward Evil, but rather a defence of Myself-Good, identified completely with the family, namely those values of attachment and reassuring certainty it determines.⁵

Let’s return to general observations on the Italian family, a subject about which there is little published literature, even though the family is crucial to understanding Italian society.⁶As Paul Ginsborg put it in the introduction to his latest work on contemporary Italy,

In Italy family is very important, both as a metaphor and as reality. In terms of metaphor, it is omnipresent, from the “family” of managers trained by Enrico Cuccia in Mediobanca, to the “family” of criminals organized by the mafia. In analysing this metaphor more closely, in terms of emitting and receiving zones, it is striking how often the family is taken as the metaphor for other social or political aggregations, rather than the other way around. In other words, it is not the state or any organisation in society which provides examples for the family, but the family which provides metaphors and role models for society and state. (...) As for social reality, the importance of family traverses very many moments of this history, from the dominance of family in the ownership of firms, large and small, to the recruitment into the largest political party by the method described by one political scientist as “enforced family membership”, from the pre-eminence of family-run shops in the physiognomy of Italy’s service sector, to the use of family contacts as a means of coping with Italian bureaucracy, from “family days” at FIAT in the 1980s to widespread nepotism within the state apparatuses.⁷

³See the case of Maria Morello. For a detailed description of Maria Morello’s clan, Ombretta Ingrassi, ‘Como: il clan dei Mazzaferro’, *Omicron/35*, Ottobre-Novembre 2001, Anno V, 10/11.

⁴Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia*, pp. 57-58.

⁵Franco Di Maria, ‘Identità e sentire mafioso. Percorsi per leggere le trasformazioni’, in Lo Verso, *La mafia dentro*, p. 42.

⁶Reeder, *Women in White*, p. 38.

⁷Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents*, p. xiii.

Why is the family in Italy such an important social group? This can be explained by various factors, including the historical formation of the Italian state and the weakness of the welfare state. In the words of Gabriella Gribaudi: '(...) in the entire country the force of family love and loyalty made up for the state weaknesses caused by the specific process of the formation of the Italian state.'⁸ Thus, family and kinship networks were indispensable both in the past, when the centralized state was absent, and later when it did not develop those elements capable of supporting individuals. These conditions were even more marked in Southern regions that, before the Unification of Italy, had experienced several foreign administrations with distant and consequently negligent central governments. This situation did not improve either with Piedmontese administration or with the formation of the Republic (since the post-Second World War period) because the historical gap between the North and the South has not been eliminated. In short, kinship relationships have played a key role in many fields and at many levels of society in Southern Italy.⁹

To some observers, the closeness of the family in the South brought about a lack of civic sensibility that thus led to the patronage system and finally the mafia.¹⁰ To describe this process, scholars employed the term 'amoral familism' coined by Edward Banfield to illustrate the findings of his fieldwork carried out in a little town in Lucania in 1958.¹¹ Recent studies on the South, led by the scholarship of the historical journal *Meridiana*, contested the generalization of this category by maintaining that defining the Southern family as characterized by amoral familism reduced it to a single, stereotyped model. One issue of *Meridiana*, entirely dedicated to the family, maintained that the analysis of Southern Italy 'has been misinterpreted due to unilateral and all-inclusive ideological blueprints. General categories, such as backwardness (often drawn from political debates and discussions without any sort of mediation), have melted down the complex social organization of these regions into a sort of indistinct sociological purgatory.'¹² There is no space here to deepen the debate over the term 'amoral

⁸Gabriella Gribaudi, 'Familismo e famiglia a Napoli e nel Mezzogiorno', *Meridiana*, 17, Maggio 1993, p.13.

⁹A synthesis of the debate on Italian Southern family is to be found in Nicholas J. Esposito, *Italian Family Structure*, Peter Lang, New York, 1989.

¹⁰For the literature on familism see AA.VV., *Dopo il familismo cosa?*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 1992.

¹¹Edward Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, Free Press, Chicago, 1958.

¹²*Meridiana*, 17, Maggio 1993.

familism',¹³ suffice is to say, along with Gabriella Gribaudi, that Banfield 'improperly blamed the family instead of attributing the causes to the historical marginality.'¹⁴ According to Banfield's followers, who apply his monolithic category of analysis to different realities, 'the Southern family would show no public ethos, no form of solidarity outside itself and within a larger social context, no interest in taking part in realities which do not directly concern the domestic nucleus of belonging.'¹⁵

There is sufficient ground, however, to support that the concept of 'familism' without the 'amoral' attribute is appropriate for describing the traditional family in rural areas of Sicily and Calabria.¹⁶ Vincenzo Masini's work has illustrated this by showing that the family was 'defensive with strongly inclusive bonds (...).'¹⁷ In fact, 'the process of socialisation this kind of family creates tends to constantly raise a barrier between the family circle and the rest of the world, which is considered by the family to be either '*babbo*' (stupid), and as such to be tricked and deceived, or powerful and to be respected.'¹⁸ In the sexual division of labour and social roles within this household, the father was the one who was expected to show power as well as intimidate the other members of the family through his authority. This increased when the father emigrated because he then became a mythical figure.¹⁹ As we shall see, such mythical construction of the absentee father also occurred in the mafia when he was in prison or on the run. As Masini illustrated, even the role of the mother was of great importance.

The female figure is the one who remains firmly at the core of the family group, who by covering everything with compensative, comprehensive and effusive love, guarantees the internal cohesion of the group. The role and attitude of the mother make clear that the only thing not to be betrayed is blood. The role of women is in fact that which is most profoundly at the core of the relational dynamic within the extended family (...); she has a fundamental role in settling controversies among men.²⁰

¹³For a synthesis of the history of the term and its critiques, Alessio Colombi, 'L'invenzione del familismo amorale', in AA.VV., *Dopo il familismo*, pp. 201-212.

¹⁴Gribaudi, 'Familismo e famiglia', p.14.

¹⁵*ibid.* p. 13.

¹⁶For an analysis of the traditional family in Calabria see Maria Minicuci, 'La casa natale, la casa sognata: Zaccanopoli', in Francesco Faeta (a cura di), *L'architettura popolare in Italia, Calabria*, Marotta Editore, Milano, 1989.

¹⁷Vincenzo Masini, *Sociologia di Sagunto*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 1984, p.110.

¹⁸*ibid.*, p.111.

¹⁹Cutrufelli, *Disoccupata con onore*, p.71.

²⁰Masini, *Sociologia*, p.112.

In the example of this family, not only the nuclear group but also the kinship web is essential inasmuch as it 'establishes relationships with external subjects but only so they can be engulfed in order to institutionalise this kinship: uncles, cousins, and brothers-in-law or, where the kinship is not possible, *compari* and *comari*, godfathers and godmothers.'¹

Masini's observations on the inclusiveness of this kind of family are particularly useful in analysing the mafia family. In violent contexts, such as those in the mafia, this family inclusiveness shifts from being a defensive attitude to an offensive one. However, it must be considered that cohesion in mafia families exists only in order to carry out mafia activities for which the family is ready to sacrifice its members. Most mafia families are dominated by violence and opportunism rather than love and affection. There exists an exploitative use of family relationships within the mafia family. Such a pattern of family relationships emerges, for instance, from Rita Di Giovine's painful words, as we shall explore in chapter seven.

Another case that offers some insight into this is that of Cinzia Lipari, daughter of Pino Lipari, one of the lieutenants of Bernardo Provenzano, head of the Cosa Nostra. Arrested in 2001, once in prison Pino Lipari chose his daughter, Cinzia, as his lawyer who was later arrested and charged with mafia association, as will be discussed later in this study. The central point to be made here is that her father was concerned more with his business than Cinzia's precarious health due to a difficult pregnancy, which prevented her from visiting her father in prison. This was a serious problem for Pino since, as his lawyer, Cinzia represented his vehicle for communication with the mafia organisation from prison. In several video taped conversations, Pino Lipari complained with his wife about the fact Cinzia did not attend prison meetings. Let's take one of these conversations, which also shows the extent intercepted conversations can be a useful means of investigating the internal structure of mafia family relationships. In the following quote, 'G' stands for Giuseppe Lipari, 'M' for Giuseppe's wife Maria, and 'A' for Giuseppe's son Alessandro; the citation will be in Italian and followed by a summary in English.¹

G = Io ho scritto , ho scritto la lettera , te la vedi , te la copi e gliela fai avere, ma quando viene ...è giusto , quando viene CINZIAVedete un poco quando può, quando pensa di venire lei ... la settimana che entra ?

M = Venire CINZIA no.

G = Non può venire più?

M = No, se non partorisce non può venire più , PINO ..

G = Minchia e come faccio con questa lettera io ? ... la prossima voltatu ora ...

M = La puoi mettere in una busta chiusa , se viene GALFANO gli dici : " gliela fa avere a mia figlia" .

G = No.

A = No, che fa " babbii".

M = Allora niente.

G = No , no. Minchia e ora ...

M =... se mai la settimana che entra , quando esci i pantaloni Quando mi esci un paio di pantaloni , la infili dentro l'orlo della

A = ... di nuovo ci andate ...noo..noo...

M = ..non li toccano...

G = ..no..no..no..

M =.. e allora niente , PINO.

G = E quindi CINZIA allora non può venire più ?

M = Se non partorisce no, te l'ho detto che cosa rischia

G =perché ora nei colloqui se ne parla , perché ne volevo fare un pezzo , tagliarla con la forbice, e farla mezza di qua e di là ...che non possono non si capisce niente , e metà , poi tuincollarsi , ma ci vogliono due colloqui , ora uno è ora

M = PINO , non lo so può essere che ... perché ha , ha le contrazioni hai capito ? .è stata male , si è sentita poco bene ... quindi può darsi che

G = ..va bene , niente ci fa , un mese in più , un mese in meno

M = ..lei non si sente niente ,

G = Ma , io posso fare una cosasenti a me , il prossimo colloquio gliela faccio mettere nelle robe di questo ... (con il capo fa un cenno indicando un altro detenuto)

M = PINO ma lascia andare , perché devi rischiare , ma nelle robe di chi?

A = ...papà , un mese in più , un mese in meno che succede ...

G = .. e che fa , le devo bruciare queste coseva be non è che si tratta di un mese , che di un mese si tratta

M = ..meno di un mese ..

G = ..quindi può essere anche due mesi senza venire , perché capace ormai se ne parla a partorire , verso il verso il dieci di novembre , poi deve stare altri quindici giorniquindi siamo a dicembre ...

M = PINO , ascoltami , mi fai dire una cosa se ...se con questa cura che sta facendo le contrazioni si , diminuiscono e ritorna normale dopo una settimana di riposo, capace che LIBERATORE gli dice : "CINZIA ti puoi mettere in piedi" , come può essere pure che compra.....

G = ...questo... comunque tu fammi sapere ora quando .. i pacchi non li aprono all'uscita , ...incompr...²¹

SUM: Pino complains to his wife about the fact Cinzia couldn't make it to the prison visits. He did so even when Maria explained to him Cinzia health's problems due to her pregnancy. However, given Pino's insistence, Maria tried to calm down him by saying: 'We will see, maybe after the treatment the doctor gave her, she will be better and the contractions will diminish, so maybe she will return to normal, after a week of rest, maybe Liberatore (the doctor) will tell her: "Cinzia, you can stand up".'

Another information source in exploring the private life of a mafia family, in particular the role of the mother, were testimonies of Juvenile Court magistrates who, in dealing with cases concerning young persons charged with mafia association, were concerned with mothers visiting their sons in prison. The following passage analysing the relationships between members of a mafia family, in particular mother-daughter, mother-son and father-son, relies on information from interviews with those magistrates. Moreover, to understand the primary socialization in the mafia social context, I used the remarkable work by Giuseppe Casarrubea and Pia Blandano.²² Working as teachers in a Palermo high school, they grounded their thesis on direct experience to which they applied some criminological and sociological theories.

Generally speaking, as Berger and Luckman have demonstrated, primary socialisation is fundamental in the construction of personality. It is 'crucial to the process of identity building. It cannot be defined in a preset time, but can be considered as the first socialisation a person undertakes in childhood and that which will allow him/her to become a member of society. (...) The members of the family are fundamental and are imposed on the subject.'²³The child identifies himself/herself with the people who take care of him/her at the beginning of his/her life, on whose model of values and principles the child builds his/her reference framework. Later, during their development they should have the opportunity to draw away from their parents to enter the world of secondary socialisation. Casarrubea and Blandano demonstrated that in mafia families the passage from primary socialization to secondary socialisation is almost absent.²⁴In the case of the mafioso, his/her first formation occurs within the family by adopting those sets of beliefs, values and concepts that the parents indicate as 'normal' in contrast with the values and principles considered normal by society. Related to this opposite concept of normality is

²¹ *ibid.*, pp. 222-223.

²² Casarrubea, Blandano, *L'educazione mafiosa*, pp. 124-125.

²³ *ibid.*, pp. 124-125.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 124.

the mafia fear of all educational programs, based on the concept of legality, carried out in schools or in parish recreation centres. The mafia considers these initiatives of civil society more threatening than police investigations. The case of Padre Pino Puglisi was emblematic, a priest who worked in the slum area of Palermo Brancaccio and was murdered by the mafia in 1993. The mafia death sentence came because the priest was trying to propose other values within a context sustained by mafia culture.²⁵

Not surprisingly, therefore, mafia families tend to maintain the nurturing process as long as possible within the household, presenting the values proposed outside the kinship group as wrong and unworthy. As psychologists teach us, the mother has a fundamental role in the intra-domestic process of socialization since the early psychic life of the baby is based on the relationship with her.²⁶ Describing the role of mother as transmitting a values system is not meant to show a specific quality of mafia women. As explained above, this role is a general function of women in most of society. However, given the fact that one of the characteristics of the mafia compared to other forms of criminality is its cultural cohesiveness, it is important to stress the process of transmission. As Melford Spiro found, the transmission of a cultural system leads either to a simple acquisition or total internalisation.²⁷ Both these forms of learning occur in the mafia. In the beginning, there is mere acquisition through observation and participation. Vincenzo La Piana gave me examples of how his wife and he taught their children mafia values. For example he recounted: 'It is the ideology, the doctrine that I have inculcated in them.'²⁸ When I asked La Piana how he inculcated these principles, he replied: 'We talk, and they ...it is a spontaneous thing, it is a spontaneous thing because they see a policeman, "Who is that?" "That is an asshole." So you teach them to hate from when they're little. When they come to search your house you say, "Keep hidden from this guy...."'.²⁹

Given the fact that mafia values are illegal, they have to be internalised, because a mere 'transmission of cultural systems is necessary and sufficient for the reproduction of cultural

²⁵For a detailed account of this story, Bianca Stancanelli, *A testa alta*, Einaudi, Torino, 2003, and Francesco Deliziosi, *Don Pino Puglisi. Vita del prete pugliese ucciso dalla mafia*, Mondadori, Milano, 2001.

²⁶Lo Verso, *La mafia dentro*.

²⁷Melford Spiro, *Gender Ideology and Psychological Reality: an Essay in Cultural Reproduction*, Yale University Press, Cambridge, 1997.

²⁸ Interview with Vincenzo La Piana, Bologna, 2 April 2004.

²⁹*ibid.*

systems as clichés, but not sufficient for their reproduction as cognitively salient beliefs, for that requires that the cultural systems also be internalised.’³⁰

When attributing the role of transmission to women, we do not intend to blame them or exclude the father’s presence in this function. However, this is mainly entrusted to women, as some Sicilian psychologists who have studied mafia families have amply reported.³¹ It is interesting to note, along with Renate Siebert, that the mother teaches the law of the father consisting in the subordination of women. Therefore, as explained below, she contributes to the persistence of patriarchy, as occurred in patriarchal societies. Generally speaking, the transmission of mafia values and codes is mostly through the mother until the children become adolescents. At this point the education of the child, already gendered during early development, divides according to the sexes of the parents. The upbringing of sons is entrusted to the father, of daughters to the mother. In the mafia, indeed, a person experiences ‘a strong correlation between the self-image and the image of the parent of the same sex.’³² Both boys and girls learn to respect their parents, their fathers as representatives of manhood, endowed with the high value given to virility, but women only as mothers, not as representatives of womanhood. The two are in fact distinguished in the mafia concept of gender. In the male-centred mafia system, women count because of their role as mothers, insofar as they give birth to male babies. This reduction of the importance of the female role is connected to the narrow prevailing interpretation in Italian society of womanhood as motherhood, influenced by Catholicism, as seen in chapter three. Catholicism has provided in fact

a rather specific model of motherhood. The archetypal mother-son relation is represented in the imagery of the Virgin and the child, even though that child is male and the Catholic (or more generally Christian) pantheon offers no model for mother-daughter relations. So both within family structures and religious iconography and practice the ideal of motherhood is powerful and ubiquitous, and informs the construction of women’s sentiments and aspirations.³³

It is not surprising that in the mafia, with its particularly accentuated notion of virility compared to civil society, women are considered worthy only in their reproductive function. In the mafia, women themselves tend to overemphasise their role as mothers because they know, as will be explained later, that womanhood separate from motherhood

³⁰Spiro, *Gender Ideology*, p.177.

³¹*ibid.*, p. 31.

³²Casarrubea, Blandano, *L’educazione mafiosa*, p.131.

³³Goddard, *Gender, Family and Work*, p.194.

deserves mostly contempt. Many times throughout our encounter, Rita made references to the generational transmission both of contempt toward woman and the exaltation of men by women themselves to whom 'all women are bitches since their birth', apart from those who are mothers.³⁴

Finally, the mother teaches both boys and girls the belief in women's inferiority and thus the hierarchy of the sexes; she teaches her son to distrust women and encourages his contempt for them, unless they are their future wives and as such mothers of their sons. In essence, the mother occupies a vital role in the family hierarchy, because she transmits the concepts of male superiority and female inferiority. The relationship between mother and daughter is key to the perpetuation of this model.³⁵ Paola Cori defined this educational pattern as 'masochistic', because by perpetuating female subordination to patriarchal authority women go against their long-term interests as women.³⁶ Though this interpretation is interesting, I would define this pattern as 'self-defensive', since mothers are transmitting a *modus* to their daughters, whereby they can achieve recognition in a male-centred context.

The fact women are more highly regarded by the community because they give birth to male babies explains the strong relationship between mother and son that exists in mafia culture.³⁷ 'The birth of the male allows the woman, if only at second hand, to participate in the splendour of the male principle – the dominant principle in the public sphere – and, simultaneously, it gives her the opportunity to form it and bind it, to make it dependent and make it hers by proxy – in private.'³⁸ This is why mothers themselves tend to promote the superiority of their sons thus further emphasising the male position and neglecting the female:

To bring up her own son in the illusion of his supremacy, involves the woman's tying him to her, being his witness, his guarantor of this superiority, in which she has an illusory participation by virtue of being the mother; yet it also involves instilling in him and confirming for him the negative value, whether latent or manifest, of the female, perhaps even contempt for women. By this way of giving

³⁴*ibid.*, p.336.

³⁵For a bibliography on mother-daughter relationship see Paula J. Caplan, *The New Don't Blame Mother. Mending the Mother-daughter Relationship*, Routledge, London, 2000.

³⁶Paola Corso, 'Alle donne non è consentita l'aggressività', in AA.VV., *Dal materno al mafioso- Ruoli delle donne nella cultura delle mafie*, Quaderni di CLD- Cultura Legalità Democratica, n. 1, Edizione Regione Toscana, Firenze, 1996.

³⁷According to Paul Ginsborg, relationship between mother and son is one of main features characterizing Italian family. Indeed statistics in the 1990s still 'confirm strongly the picture of mother-son dependencies', Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents*, p. 79.

³⁸Siebert, *Secrets of Life*, pp.58-59.

value to the maternal, mothers contribute to devaluing the female, to devaluing women.³⁹

A clear example of a son-mother relationship is that of Rita Di Giovine's mother, Maria Serraino, and her son Emilio. It is interesting to note that, as Rita put it, Maria 'was crazy about him', and Emilio received special treatment from his mother unlike Rita: 'My mother was really jealous of my brother, the older one; she was always keen on my older brother, she was ready to do anything for the older brother. But then she had a weakness for all the men in the family; she would be have done anything for her sons.'⁴⁰ Throughout the interview Rita made constant reference to the lack of attention from her mother, who instead reserved all her consideration and love for her sons who were:

Gods, I was the whore and they were the kings. To please my brother, I had to sell everything, my dowry, my gold, everything. Do everything for them... If her son told her, "I need a million lire," his mama went to look for the million and looked so hard she found it. I would ask her, "Mama, I need a pair of shoes" and she would say, "You can do without them." You carry this mentality from generation to generation.⁴¹

There is no doubt that masculinity is the primary feature of the mafia system since it emerges 'from the quantitative presence of male figures at all levels of the organisation and from cultural aspects linked to the symbolic importance given to some events: the birth of the male baby, his "initiation", the encouragement of some skills instead of others, etc.'⁴² In the light of this mafia characteristic, Casarubbea and Blandano concentrated their analysis on the relationship between son and father, within which there is a process of identification: a mafioso's son has the perception that the model passed on by his father is completely realised, at least according to some criteria (such as enrichment, respect, power, etc.); within the family, despite its vertical structure, given the fact that the family-centred view prevails, loving relationships between the various components are experienced in a exasperated way (for example, honour).⁴³

Undoubtedly, the experiences gained from life with the father, who is the authority, have a tremendous impact on the concept of authority the son develops.⁴⁴ In the case of the mafioso, the concept of authority is linked to criminality and illegality.⁴⁵ The mother still

³⁹*ibid.* p. 59.

⁴⁰Interview with Rita Di Giovine, Milan, 24 April 1998.

⁴¹*ibid.*

⁴²Casarubbea, Blandano, *L'educazione mafiosa*, p.131.

⁴³*ibid.*, p. 134.

⁴⁴*ibid.*, p.131.

⁴⁵*ibid.*, p.133.

plays a fundamental role even in the relationship between father and son since she supports the figure of the father. Casarrubea and Blandano, quoting Lewis Yablonsky, list the factors enabling the son to absorb the messages from his father.⁴⁶ One example happens when the other significant figures in his life, especially his mother, encourage the child to accept his father as a model.⁴⁷ In the mafia family 'a favoured relationship exists with the son (the masculinity of the phenomenon), which most of the time is supported, if not even stimulated by the maternal figure.'⁴⁸ The tendency to present the father as a positive model is even greater when the father is absent, either in jail or on the run. The mother passes on an ultra-positive image of the father who is not present thus initiating a myth-making process.⁴⁹ This was confirmed by magistrate Alessandra Camassa who gathered first-hand testimonies of women from the Valle del Belice, near Trapani, involved in a mafia trial:

The figure of women in their role as mothers within the mafia family was completely clear; the mother, though in her role as housewife, played a primary function since she supported the model transmitted by the father. And, indeed, the daughters frequently told me that their fathers were absent from the household, yet always present through the mythologizing accounts of their mothers, a mother-woman who creates a hero-man who in reality does not exist.⁵⁰

Hence, bringing up children according to the law of the father becomes more important in cases where the father is absent as he is in prison or in hiding. The endurance of patriarchal authority in the household even though the father is not present depends on the nurturing work that the women carry out on their children. Bernardo Provenzano, the current head of Cosa Nostra, has been on the run since 1963. During his hiding, his wife Saveria Palazzolo gave birth to four babies who were recorded at the registry office. She sent them to study in Germany and they are now enrolled at the University of Palermo. Apparently they are not involved in the criminal activities of their father. However, they are deeply devoted to him. This is demonstrated by the letters sent to him by the sons and found in one of the places where Provenzano had been hiding.⁵¹ From these letters it emerges that the authority of Provenzano over his sons has remained intact, even if they have only lived with him for a

⁴⁶ Lewis Yablonsky, *Padri e figli: il più arduo e stimolante di tutti i rapporti*, Roma, Astrolabio, 1988.

⁴⁷ Casarrubea, Blandano, *L'educazione mafiosa*, p. 134.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 134.

⁴⁹ For an analysis of this process in families where fathers emigrated, Simonetta Piccone Stella, *Ragazze del Sud*, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1979.

⁵⁰ Alessandra Camassa, 'Lo psichismo mafioso femminile. Una testimonianza', in Lo Verso, *La mafia dentro*, p. 121.

⁵¹ Documenti nr. 1586, 1563, see also Bellavia, Palazzolo, *Voglia di mafia*, pp. 27-31.

short time, if at all. This was the result of the way Saveria, along with an entire social ideology, maintained the importance of the male figure within the household.

The final aspect that should be noted in regard to the mother's role in the mafia family is that her level of involvement in the role of transmitting mafia values changes according to her origins. A woman with a mafia pedigree willingly accepts passing on her husband's mafia family values. On the contrary, a conflict between the woman's values and those of her husband might arise in the case of a mother who was not brought up in a mafia family. Arranged marriages, as we will see, aim to avoid the latter possibility. Therefore what Renate Siebert maintains is disputable, namely that a remarkable difference exists between the mother's role in the Southern Italian family and the mafia family. She states that the role of the mother:

despite appearances, is strong and essential within the context of the Southern family and yet we cannot say the same for the role within mafia families. Here they seem subordinated, with no substantial power in the relationships with their children. The traditional networks of reciprocity, exchange, varied mediation between family group and society, within which woman had a *de facto* role, unravelled when faced with a hierarchical structure under the dominion of a father/boss who at the moment of his mafia membership swore to subordinate even his closest relatives to the supremacy of the 'honoured Society'.⁵²

Contrary to Siebert's observation, this section has demonstrated that mothers in the mafia, at least those with mafia origins, whom this thesis calls internal to the mafia, as explained in the introduction to the next chapter, have strong educational powers, equal to mothers within Southern Italian families. There is a danger in undervaluing this role because the survival of the mafia as a criminal organisation also depends upon the endurance of mafia culture, which is transmitted through the mother. Prosecutor Caterina Chinnici told me many cases existed of young mafiosi who showed the desire to collaborate with justice in the beginning. Yet, once they met their mothers they changed their mind.⁵³

4.2. *Active function: encouraging vendetta*

Vendetta is blood revenge aimed at extinguishing the shame originated by an offence that has brought dishonour. Broadly speaking, vendetta was traditionally a popular institution endemic in areas of Italy (such as Calabria, Sardinia and Sicily) where state

⁵²Renate Siebert, 'La mafia e le donne', in Luciano Violante (a cura di), *Mafia e società italiana. Rapporto '97*, Laterza, Bari, 1997.

⁵³Interview with Public Prosecutor Caterina Chinnici, Caltanissetta, 12 October 2003.

control over violence was absent. It was used to regulate relationships between people and satisfy their desire for justice. With the growth of centralised control, vendetta ceased to be an institution of *ordinamento giuridico* (judicial order) and an alternative to the absentee state, yet it remained a custom.

In 1959, Antonio Pigliaru wrote a remarkable book on vendetta in Barbagia –a region of Sardinia.⁵⁴ His interest in customs that became law and those that remained tradition prompted him to study the practice of vendetta and to translate the oral principles of vendetta into a written code. This ‘translation’, based on newspapers, popular literature on Sardinia bandits, and oral sources, is a valuable tool for understanding the popular institution of vendetta, even though he referred to Sardinia.⁵⁵ According to Pigliaru’s code, an action engenders the need for revenge when ‘the event on which the vendetta depends (...) is organised with the aim of injuring other people’s honour and dignity.’⁵⁶

The employment of the vendetta settled disputes of various origins. A typical example of an offence that traditionally required revenge was ‘the breaking of a marriage promise. In this case, the offence affects publicly the honour of the promised bride, along with the dignity and honour of her family. (...)’⁵⁷ Although the development of a state justice system made the institution of vendetta unnecessary, it remained in the mafia code by becoming a justification for violent deeds aimed at exercising control over a given territory. This deeply rooted social custom helped the mafia to maintain a sort of consensus by using it as an alibi.

An expert on the ‘Ndrangheta, Prosecutor Salvatore Boemi, told Renate Siebert that mafia feuds in Calabria were apparently caused by points of honour, thus confirming the instrumental use of this custom: ‘In reality, feuds occurred for control over the criminal territory. Beyond the blood feud was a series of criminal economic interests that led some families, previously accustomed to sharing profits and territorial control, to dominating an entire town.’⁵⁸

The institution of vendetta was less deeply rooted in Sicily than in Calabria, where the clans of the ‘Ndrangheta were in an almost permanent state of warfare.⁵⁹ *Pentito* Saverio Morabito explained there were fewer feuds in the Cosa Nostra because of the existence of

⁵⁴ Antonio Pigliaru, *La vendetta barbaricina*, il Maestrale, Nuoro, 2001.

⁵⁵ For a detailed description of the sources he had used, *ibid.*, p. 119.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.146.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 149.

⁵⁸ Unpublished Renate Siebert interview with Salvatore Boemi, April 2002. For other passages of this interview concerning the vendetta in the ‘Ndrangheta see Siebert, ‘Donne di mafia: affermazione di uno pseudo-soggetto femminile. Il caso della ‘Ndrangheta’, in AA.VV., *donne e mafie*, p.31.

⁵⁹ For the vendetta custom in traditional Calabria, Luigi M. Lombardi Satriani, Mariano Meligrana, *Il ponte di San Giacomo*, Rizzoli, Milano, 1987, pp. 327-351.

the Cupola, which decides whether or not a murder can be carried out, whilst in the 'Ndrangheta 'if someone wants revenge, he can do as he pleases, even after a long time.'⁶⁰ This was for reasons in line with the traditional code according to which the revenging action constitutes in turn a new reason for revenge. However, as Boemi explained, there were also economic reasons behind a vendetta action. An example of this double explanation (ideological and practical) of mafia feuds was the war from 1985 to 1991 in the area surrounding Reggio Calabria. This conflict broke out with the murder of Ciccio Serraino, followed by several other murders according to the reasoning that 'blood washes away blood'. However, behind this feud lay economic reasons linked to the potential construction of a bridge between Reggio Calabria and Messina.⁶¹

Women play an active role in the transmission of the ideology and practice of the vendetta and encourage their men folk to commit revenge. The media, including cinema and television, has transmitted the image of mafia women dressed in black, crying for vendetta over the bodies of their dead relatives. Often this is yet another stereotype that leads observers to neglect the more complex involvement of women in the mafia. However, reductive as it is, this image gives us a piece of reality; asking for revenge for a murdered relative has been always a female task. Public Prosecutor Alessandra Camassa observed in relation to vendetta in Cosa Nostra: 'Another element emerging from my judicial experience was the role of mafia women in transmitting the vendetta culture, actually in what is defined the "pedagogy of vendetta".'⁶² Documentary evidence of women calling for vendetta dates back to the beginning of the last century. As historian Salvatore Lupo reported, a journalist from *L'Ora* in 1911, in recounting the funeral of the Sicilian socialist leader Lorenzo Panepinto, wrote: 'female figures showed their grief: the daughter of the mafia boss was surrounded by the women from S.Stefano, all dressed in their black shawls. They seemed possessed by some mysterious passion and screamed terrifically... Vendetta was the word that came from all their mouths... the widow repeated 'Revenge him, revenge him' like a singsong.'⁶³

⁶⁰ Piero Colaprico, Luca Fazzo, *Manager Calibro 9*, Garzanti, 1995, p. 98.

⁶¹ Enzo Ciconte, *Processo alla 'Ndrangheta*, Laterza, Bari, 1996, pp.142-143.

⁶² Lo Verso, *La mafia dentro*, p. 122.

⁶³ Lupo, *Storia della mafia*, p. 163.

In Calabrian tradition, women called '*periferiche*' had the task of mourning during the funeral.⁶⁴ Crying at the funeral where revenge was called for is central to the vendetta custom.⁶⁵

Magistrate Boemi, in line with the argument of this thesis, stresses the active element of this female task: 'Hence, the woman is not a passive subject in the feud; she is an active subject. She is a subject who strongly calls for vendetta and she will be heard, because she is respected even though not part of the organisation.'⁶⁶Rita's testimony was significant in this sense, particularly when she told me an episode involving her female cousins in Calabria. A man in their family was shot dead by a rival clan. Rita was upset for a while. Her cousins, by contrast, did not shed a single tear. Their response was simply: '*Gli hanno ammazzati? Bene domani muoiono gli altri.*' ('So they murdered him? Well, tomorrow they'll die.'). And, indeed, the suspected culprits duly disappeared a short time later.⁶⁷

In some mafia areas of Sicily and Calabria, the murder of a relative provokes not only sorrow but also shame. This is what Grazia Ribisi felt when her brothers were murdered. In the early 1980s, Grazia's brothers established control over Palma di Montechiaro, a town near Agrigento. Married to the boss of a clan allied with her brothers, Grazia was in touch with them while they were on the run. Her husband's clan at first decided to abandon the Ribisi brothers; but when they became an obstacle to the organisation, they decided to kill them. 'When she heard of the betrayal, Grazia Ribisi was furious. She talked to her husband on the phone, calling his relatives cowards and traitors for abandoning them in their hour of need. (...) She cursed the men who had murdered her brothers, and swore revenge.'⁶⁸By reorganising her brother's clan and double-crossing her husband's family, she became one of the protagonists of the feud that took place in Palma di Montechiaro. Eventually she was arrested, yet she was never convicted since her involvement could not be proven.

One of the greatest disgraces that must be redeemed through vendetta is betrayal by mafiosi who turn state's evidence. The purpose of punishing the turncoat is one of both retaliation and deterrence. The mixture of the two illustrates the hallmark of the mafia, namely the combination of modern and traditional aspects. In terms of retaliation, the

⁶⁴ Lombardi Satriani, Meligrana, *Il ponte di San Giacomo*, p. 339.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 339.

⁶⁶ Siebert, 'Donne di mafia', in AA.VV., *donne e mafie*, p.31.

⁶⁷ Interview with Rita Di Giovine, Milan, 24 April 1998.

⁶⁸ Longrigg, *Mafia Women*, p.87.

pentito, called derogatively *infame*, must be punished because he/she betrayed his/her mafia Family as well as frequently the natural one. The vendetta eliminates the shame of having an *infame* in the family thereby regaining lost respectability. In practical terms, the vendetta has a powerfully deterrent effect in preventing others from collaborating with the state. The same reasons, retaliation and deterrence, might engender the so-called *vendetta trasversale* ('side vendetta' or vendetta against the next of kin) entailing the murder of the relatives of the *pentiti*. One of the cruellest cases in the history of the mafia was that of *pentito* Santino Di Matteo's son, Giuseppe, who in 1996 was strangled and dissolved in a bath of acid. Another terrible case involved the wife, mother-in law and sister in law of supergrass Francesco Mannoia, brutally executed in the mid-1990s.

According to the principle of the *vendetta trasversale*, revenge will be carried out until the 7th generation of kinship of the person the vendetta is directed toward. Tommaso Buscetta, the most famous Cosa Nostra supergrass, lost a great number of relatives even a long time after his *pentimento*. Anthropologist Anton Blok gave a symbolic explanation of the *vendetta trasversale*: '(...) many *pentiti* lost close kinsmen after they testified. The culture of blood feuds –the launching of vendettas against entire families in revenge for offences by single members –seems to fit the Indo-European notion that blood symbolizes the strongest and most enduring human bonds.'⁶⁹ Through cross-cultural investigation, Blok found that practice of lasting vendetta also characterized other regions of the Mediterranean including Sardinia, Corsica, Montenegro, Albania, the Moroccan Rif, and among the Bedouin.⁷⁰

Traditionally, people who lost their honour occupied a difficult position in the community because they were 'expected, even socially obliged, to take revenge. (...) Plunged into mourning, these victims have all the features of people "out of place". They are avoided, excluded, ostracized –until they have taken revenge. Only after they have "taken blood" (and thus removed their defilement) is their mourning over and can they be reincorporated into everyday social life. This often happened in a festive way and they feel, as they say, reborn and sanctified, having moved from shame to honour.'⁷¹ This feeling is still widespread in mafia areas, where the shame of being betrayed by a relative is unbearable. From the testimonies of *pentita* Rita Di Giovine's brother-in-law, the fact

⁶⁹ Blok, *Honour and Violence*, p. 97.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 96.

⁷¹ *ibid.*

emerged that her Calabrian aunt was planning to kill her in order to wipe away with blood the shame of having a *pentita* in her family. Her aunt will keep mourning as long as Rita is alive. This case confirms what Renate Siebert wrote: 'the period of vendetta is as long as the period of mourning: until the execution of the vendetta, reconstructing the social crisis provoked by the offence, mourning cannot end.'⁷²

Moreover, the vendetta follows a timetable in that it is carried out on the anniversary of the offence. This practice, called *calendarizzazione*, is meant to remember the day of the event that brought dishonour. In symbolic terms, the vendetta is a sort of ritual in memory of the dead, and thus it is executed during the anniversary.'⁷³ The task of remembering is a female one; women are the guardians of family memory. The practical purpose of the custom of *calendarizzazione* is to display the ability of maintaining the commitment to the threat thereby proving one's own power even after long periods of time.⁷⁴ According to coroner Giuseppe Modica, in charge of autopsies in the region of Reggio Calabria, the female relatives of mafia victims fought to gain access to the dead body of their relatives in order to count the number of gunshot wounds. They would then plan to inflict one wound more when the vendetta was consummated.

As mentioned above, women adopt the role of encouraging men to commit revenge in order to eradicate the offence. Magistrate Camassa reported that, 'it was well known that in the 1950s the mother of one of the Partanna Family bosses, who was murdered in front of his house, ordered her son to commit revenge while his father's body was still warm.'⁷⁵ There have been cases of men committing revenge against their will just because women compelled them to do so. One of the most famous examples was that of Serafina Battaglia who in 1960 vainly sent her son to avenge the murder of his stepfather. Every morning Serafina said to him, '*Aalzati che hanno ammazzato a tuo padre! Aalzati e valli ad ammazzare.*' ('Get up, they killed your father! Get up and go kill them!').⁷⁶ Even though he was not involved in criminal activities, he had to obey his mother's orders and was shot dead before committing the revenge. Afterwards, Serafina Battaglia took it upon herself to exact revenge by testifying against the people from her husband's rival clan, guilty of her

⁷² Siebert, *Secrets of Life*, p. 38.

⁷³ Enzo Ciconte, *Ndrangheta*, p. 63.

⁷⁴ Satriani, Meligrana, *Il ponte di San Giacomo*, p. 343.

⁷⁵ Camassa, 'Lo psichismo mafioso', in Lo Verso, *La mafia dentro*, p. 122.

⁷⁶ Madeo, *Donne di mafia*, p. 190.

men's murders. I will explore Serafina's story in more detail in the chapter dealing with *pentitismo*.

Another instance of women putting pressure on men to extract revenge concerned the female relatives of *pentito* Leonardo Canino, who told Ignazio De Francisci, the Public Prosecutor that heard his testimony, that his grandmother and aunts called him *infame* because he refused to avenge his father's murder. Eventually, he decided to please them.⁷⁷ This practice of female encouragement to commit revenge is part of the Sicilian culture of stressing the duty of men in connection with their expected virility, according to gender type behaviours. Lo Verso observed in relation to the '*delitto d'onore*' ('crime of honour'): 'The "crime of honour" in Sicily has always been something feminine as well: "*E tu omo si?*" ("Are you a man?") was said with disdain by women to men who did not take blood revenge on one who had lacked respect for them.'⁷⁸

In the last part of this section, I will turn to verbal expressions and sayings used to threaten and describe blood revenge, such as 'blood washes away blood', 'offences must be washed with blood' and 'vendetta is the best forgiveness'.⁷⁹ Norman Lewis observed that in Italy the custom of: 'the kissing, even the pretended sucking of the wounds, by close relations such as mother, wife or brother, followed by the spoken formula, "In this way may I drink the blood of the man who killed you," was widespread.'⁸⁰ Anthropologists have examined the language of expressions referring to blood revenge. Campbell in his well-known work on a Greek community reported they, 'believe that in some way a killer absorbs the strength from the blood of the men he slays. "I shall drink your blood", is a phrase that threatens murder.'⁸¹ He also reported that: '(...) one avenger bathed his hands in the blood of the original killer and returned to show his mother "the blood of her son".'⁸² Blok saw that, 'similar customs prevailed in Montenegro.'⁸³ Blok's cross-cultural discourse is relevant to this research, because I found similar expressions in some women's affirmations after their men's murders. During one of the hearings of the trial concerning the people she accused, Serafina Battaglia looked hard at Vincenzo Rimi and said to him:

⁷⁷*ibid.*, pp. 142-143.

⁷⁸Lo Verso, *La mafia dentro*, p. 32.

⁷⁹Blok, *Honour and Violence*, p. 96.

⁸⁰Quoted in Longrigg, *Mafia Women*, p.76.

⁸¹Blok, *Honour and Violence*, p. 100.

⁸²*ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

⁸³*ibid.*, p. 100.

‘You drank Totuccio’s blood and therefore I spit on you in front of God.’⁸⁴ In an interview with journalist Francesco La Licata, witness Giacomina Filippello told him that during the period before her partner, Natale L’Ala, a mafioso from Alcamo, was murdered, she stopped a man who was following them and said to him: ‘If touch a hair of my man’s head I will come after that bastard your leader and rip out his heart out with my teeth.’⁸⁵ Once her partner was murdered, Giacomina Filippello decided to collaborate with the state for revenge. This story will be examined in the chapter dealing with women and *pentitismo*. Leoluchina Sorisi, fiancée of Placido Rizzotto, the trade unionist murdered by mafioso Luciano Liggio, stated after his murder: ‘I will rip open the chest with my hands of the one who killed you and eat out his heart.’⁸⁶ Curiously, when Luciano Liggio was arrested in the mid-70s, he was hiding in Leoluchina Sorisi’s house. Had she planned a long-term vendetta by starting a relationship with the man against whom she had sworn vendetta?

Finally, it is interesting to remember that some ritual practices existed in Calabria in relation to vendetta. For example, in Aspromonte women kept the clothes or tools of the murder victim in order to remind their sons they had to carry out revenge. Lombardi Satriani reported the case of a woman from Drapia (Catanzaro province) who kept the jacket of her dead husband and gave it to her son who was only a baby at the time. After many years when the guilty person was out of prison and the son grew up, the latter put on the jacket and took revenge. Thus women teach men how to wait.⁸⁷

4.3. *Passive function: the code of honour and shame*

While the previous section discussed the vendetta as the means of restoring injured honour, this section analyses the notion of honour. This issue is of central importance to the study of mafia women.

Anthropologist Carmelo Lisòn Tolosana has brilliantly caught the feeling of ‘attempting to speak or write about the complex syndrome of Honour-Shame’, in stating that ‘(...) we enter one of those peculiar anthropological labyrinths from which it is difficult to emerge without a sensation of vertigo and confusion, such is its historical polymorphic

⁸⁴Madeo, *Donne di mafia*, p. 189.

⁸⁵Longrigg, *Mafia Women*, p. 228.

⁸⁶Giuseppe Fava, *Mafia*, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1984, p. 68.

⁸⁷Lombardi Satriani, Meligrana, *Il ponte di San Giacomo*, p. 342.

density.’⁸⁸ The difficulties in conceptualising the code of honour are reduced when adopting a long-term perspective.⁸⁹ Unfortunately, there is no space here for such an approach. However, it is important to know that the code of honour was widespread in aristocratic circles from the 15th to the 18th century and was then adopted by the bourgeoisie in the 19th century. Traditionally, it was a code of behaviour grounded mainly on outward characteristics such as bravery and violence, and aimed at regulating social conflicts. An honoured person was one able to defend his land and women. Indeed, the prescribed sexual behaviour of women -virginity and chastity- was crucial to guaranteeing men’s respect in the surrounding social context. Therefore, to avoid the loss of honour, men exercised tight control over the bodies of women, considered the property of the men of the family.⁹⁰ Thus, virginity was the symbol of family honour.⁹¹ Moreover, proper female sexual behaviour gave a good reputation not only to the family, but also the clan, town and country. Such correspondence is still found nowadays in some areas in Italy. Rosa, a young woman from Africo, a village on the Ionian coast of Calabria, told me in 2003: ‘My mother-in-law is really glad her son got married to me, because I come from Africo and women from Africo have good reputations compared to those from other Calabrian towns.’⁹² Women’s behaviour thus conditioned the respectability of the man, family and nation.

In stressing the relation between male honour and female shame as two faces of the same coin, we position our discussion within traditional anthropological scholarship on the code of honour. This has developed since the 1960s when several ethnographers carried out field research in Mediterranean countries and devised the honour and shame model. In short, these anthropologists maintained that Mediterranean societies not only shared this model but this was above all the characteristic that marked this geographic area.⁹³

⁸⁸Carmelo Lisò Tolosana, ‘The Ever-Changing Faces of Honour’, in Dionigi Albera, Anton Blok and Christian Bromberger (eds), *L’anthropologie de la Méditerranée*, Maisonneuve & Larose, Paris, 2001, p. 133.

⁸⁹Pieter Spierenburg (edited by), *Men and Violence*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, 1998.

⁹⁰For the code of honour in Sicilian agro-town at the beginning of the XX century see Reeder, *Women in White*, pp. 37-54.

⁹¹Bravo, Pelaja, Pescarolo, Scaraffia (a cura di), *Storia sociale*, p. 27.

⁹²Interview with Rosa, Florence, 13 November 2003.

⁹³See the collective work edited by J. Peristiany, *Honour and Shame. The values of Mediterranean society*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1974. For a detailed and clear discussion of classical literature on honour, John Davis, *People of the Mediterranean: An Essay in Comparative Social Anthropology*, Routledge, London, 1977. p. 90.

In 1988, a conference in Palermo contributed greatly to investigating the notion of honour in Mediterranean societies. Importantly, the speakers were both anthropologists and historians, which served to set up a dialogue between the two disciplines about the analysis of honour. Being a traditional code that has somehow endured in modern society, the notion of honour needs an anthropological explanation. On the other hand, being a social construction that changes its meaning and purpose along with the historical context, it also requires a historical analysis.⁹⁴ In the introduction to the remarkable book that collected the papers presented at the conference, Giovanna Fiume, organiser of the symposium, observed that honour, along with its violent corollaries, was still a present reality in some areas of the Mediterranean, including Sicily. She stressed that, since the constant ideology underpinning the concept of honour throughout its history has been control over the female body, women have been particularly affected by the rules of this code.⁹⁵ The contributors to the Palermo conference argued against the uniform picture of Mediterranean culture drawn by early anthropologists who had produced a unique model of interpretation. Of the same kind was the critique addressed by anthropologist Victoria Goddard, who carried out field research in Naples to explore the relationship between gender, family and work in the 1980s.⁹⁶ Her study analysed to what extent the importance given to honour in some contexts influenced women's entry into the labour market.⁹⁷ Her major critique was related to the fact that early studies overlooked the female perspective by analysing honour as a male code of behaviour 'relevant in competitive struggles between individual men and families' and relegated the role of women to a mere passive function.⁹⁸ Goddard recognised, however, that 'what was important in this literature was that it placed gender, and female sexuality in particular, at the centre of the analysis'.⁹⁹ Yet, eventually '(...) the literature ignores an analysis of honour from a female prospective'. Instead Goddard maintained that it was important considering that 'women themselves also have a system, if not of honour, then of self-appraisal and self-esteem which is related to their judgement

⁹⁴For a synthesis of the papers presented at the conference, Nino Recupero, 'Onore e storia nelle società mediterranee. Un seminario internazionale a Palermo', *Meridiana*, 2, 1988.

⁹⁵Giovanna Fiume (a cura di), *Onore e storia nelle società mediterranee*, La Luna, Palermo, 1989, p. 6 and p. 21.

⁹⁶Victoria Goddard, 'From the Mediterranean to Europe: Honour, Kinship and Gender', A. Victoria Goddard, Josep R. Llobera and Chris Shore (eds.), *The Anthropology of Europe*, Berg, Oxford, 1994, p. 60.

⁹⁷Goddard, *Gender, Family and Work*.

⁹⁸Goddard, 'From the Mediterranean to Europe', in Goddard, Llobera and Shore, *The Anthropology of Europe*, p. 173.

⁹⁹*ibid.*, p. 15.

of others.’¹⁰⁰ Although the pioneers of studies on the Mediterranean code of honour admitted that the revisionism of their model brought fresh areas to anthropological studies¹⁰¹, they kept defending their position by specifying that, ‘it would of course be foolish to deny that there are differences between countries, regions, communities, neighbourhoods, classes, families and all the way down to individuals (who cannot, literally be divided, though their biographies can be very complex). But the use of general terms does not exclude the recognition of differences, including differences between local notions of honour.’¹⁰²

In my view, critiques addressed by revisionists are valuable,¹⁰³ however if early studies on honour are read in the historic context in which they were carried out, then they represent nowadays a unique resource in understanding the code of honour and shame at work in traditional rural societies. Despite the narrowness of the location of their fieldwork, some aspects, concerning the concept of honour, may also be valid for urban areas and modern times. Read with hindsight, they become useful to our discussion, particularly in relation to the passive female role considered fundamental in the construction of male reputation. It is true in fact, that ‘whether stereotypical or not, the cultural emphasis on virginity and the chastity of women together with the exclusion of women from public space (men: women/public: private/dominance: subordination) is often singled out as a most telling and diagnostic feature of the forms of life on both shores of the Mediterranean.’¹⁰⁴ It is undeniable that the traditional anthropological model suffered from ‘excesses of codification’ and as such needed to be revisited. However, an opposite approach is not desirable because it might lead to deconstructing some conceptualisations that, albeit simplistic and rigid, can bring out gender discrimination. For example, revisionist Vanessa Maher notes that, ‘one of the weakness of the honour and shame model lies in its excessively rigid correlation with gender distinctions.’¹⁰⁵ This might be true since there is evidence that women were able to negotiate and manipulate the code in various

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p.173.

¹⁰¹ Dionigi Albera, Anton Blok, ‘The Mediterranean as a Field of Ethnological Study’, in Albera, Blok and Bromberger, *L’anthropologie de la Méditerranée*, p. 16.

¹⁰² *ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁰³ See in particular Vanessa Maher, ‘How do you translate Pudeur? From Table Manners to Eugenics’, in Albera, Blok and Bromberger, *L’anthropologie de la Méditerranée*, pp. 157-173.

¹⁰⁴ Dionigi Albera, Anton Blok, ‘The Mediterranean’, in Albera, Blok and Bromberger, *L’anthropologie de la Méditerranée*, p. 18.

¹⁰⁵ Vanessa Maher, ‘How do you translate Pudeur? From Table Manners to Eugenics’, in Albera, Blok and Bromberger, *L’anthropologie de la Méditerranée*, p. 205.

ways. However, overemphasising gender distinctions allowed better theorizing of gender discrimination.

To understand the code of honour in the mafia and its implication on women the above overview of the debate on the notion of honour is not sufficient. We need also few observations on the persistence of such a traditional code in contemporary society. According to some studies, detraditionalisation and democratisation processes in the contemporary world have led society to change the criteria according to which honour was ascertained. In his pioneering volume on modern man entitled *The Homeless Mind*, Peter Berger indicates the erosion of the code of honour as one of the hallmarks of a modern society.¹⁰⁶ He argues that modern changes involved not only technology and production but also consciousness. 'Since ascribed status and institutionalised role behaviour have lost their social significance, there is no longer any need to maintain group markers. The concern with honour is taken over by another moral enterprise, namely, the cultivation of one's dignity. (...)'¹⁰⁷ In other words, contemporary society in theory no longer needs a code of conduct based on the notion of honour for regulating social conflicts; therefore such a code has shifted to the value of dignity, linked more to inner qualities. This transformation has not occurred in some contexts, and the notion of honour has remained tied to violence. For instance, in subcultures or criminal environments, including the mafia or black American gangs, the attribution of a 'good reputation' remains linked to force and virility. As a consequence, given the fact these attributes were attached to the traditional concept of masculinity, the effect on women remains the traditional one as well.

Two characteristics, also present in the use of the code of honour in the mafia, emerge both from historical research, that investigates the use of honour in the past, and anthropological studies, that use a comparative approach to examine its persistence in modern society. Firstly, revenge due to loss of honour is often motivated by reasons of economics and power. And, 'execution of power in the guise of honour tends to be legitimate in social spaces left open by the state. Such spaces, or fields of activity, can be found in societies where no effective centralised political power exists, (...), and among groups within all-embracing state formations which for some reason have cleared their

¹⁰⁶Giovanna Fiume is in line with Berger's argument, Fiume, *Onore e storia*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁷Tor Aase (edited by), *Tournaments of Power, Honour and Revenge in the Contemporary World*, Ashgate, Burlington, 2002, p. 2.

own spaces to manoeuvre.’¹⁰⁸ Therefore, comparative studies have demonstrated that ‘the situational emergence of honour and revenge arises in certain social formations.’¹⁰⁹ As seen in chapter two, Southern Italy has been one of these formations, thus the code of honour was used as an ideology of defence and survival within a process of modernisation. The Schneiders investigated the function of traditional codes such as honour in relation to the connection between centre and periphery, local and global.¹¹⁰ They found out that the code of honour was a sort of defence of the local against the central government.

The second aspect emerging from comparative studies and present in the mafia is the dichotomy between appearing and being. Even in the traditional concept of honour, the respectability of a person might not correspond to his honourable qualities. Being a category of public evaluation, the ascription of honour was given by others, thus what matters was the public recognition. As Giovanna Fiume put it, ‘the unknown virtue does not mean anything (...) What people say I am becomes much more important than my true vices and virtues.’¹¹¹ In the space between what is known publicly (appearing) and reality (being), the rules of the honour code may be negotiated.¹¹² In other words, social practice often does not correspond to the theoretical model of the code of honour. This aspect is central to understanding one of the main characteristics of mafia society, i.e. the dichotomy between theory and practice. In the mafia social practice, economic reasons often pushed mafiosi to skip questions of honour thus negotiating the rules prescribed by the code of honour; as we will see, this option was open mainly for men.¹¹³ As Salvatore Lupo noted in analysing Sicilian mafia warfare: ‘in reality the correspondence between mafia warfare and feud must not be taken for granted.’¹¹⁴ Sometimes mafia organisations consider it more convenient to reconcile two people who had conflicted for reasons of honour. In other words, due to economic reasons it is often better to avoid a feud, even though started by a point of honour. *Pentito* La Piana explained to me that this kind of negotiation of a theoretical model of behaviour is called ‘*ragionamento*’ in mafia terms.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.* p. 16.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.* p. 16.

¹¹⁰ Schneider and Schneider, *Culture*.

¹¹¹ Fiume, *Onore e storia*, p. 12.

¹¹² *ibid.*, p. 12.

¹¹³ Salvatore Lupo uses the example of *ragionamento* to sustain that the cultural code in the mafia is not important because it is always disregarded.

¹¹⁴ Salvatore Lupo, ‘La mafia: definizione e uso di un modello virilista’, *Genesis*, II/1, 2003, p.55.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Vincenzo La Piana, Bologna, 2 April 2004.

Dealing with a traditional and popular code assumed by the mafia system leads to wondering whether or not the characteristics which marked the use of the code of honour in the mafia were specific to the mafia or common to the rest of Sicilian society or to traditional societies in general or, at any rate, to Mediterranean societies. To untangle this question, it is necessary to consider a double process, which might appear contradictory. On the one hand, the concept of honour was not specific to the mafia, since it is rooted in the environment of traditional mafia areas and shared with other Mediterranean countries. On the other hand, the notion of honour in the legitimate world has changed with modernisation, yet remained in the mafia along with other traditional elements. In this sense, the persistence of the code of honour in the mafia is a relic of the past, yet rethought and reutilised in order to depict itself as an honourable organisation. Because of the lack of study, little is known about how the rules of honour have endured in contemporary Southern Italy. Therefore it was rather difficult to draw conclusions on the relationship between the culture informing the criminal organisation and that surrounding it. There is no doubt that in the past the cultural horizon informing the mafia partly corresponded to that of its surrounding context. As we have seen above, the fact that Southern Italy has historically experienced a lack of central state control led society to regulate conflicts and competition through private rules, based on honour and the vendetta system. With Italian Unification, this system started to dissolve within society, yet it remained at the core of the mafia's judicial system. What is interesting to observe is the survival of this system in spite of the modernisation of the surrounding society. In fact, the ability to merge traditional codes with modern business is what has allowed the mafia to flourish. This is why the analysis of the transformation of the notion of honour from the long-term perspective seen above contributes to understanding the relationship between the mafia and modernity.

Current research on the mafia has deconstructed the approach associating the mafioso with the *uomo d'onore*.¹¹⁶ Historian Paolo Pezzino blamed the stereotype of the mafioso as a man of respect with the mythical image that has been attached to the mafia. Giovanna Fiume sums up Pezzino's analysis:

The mafia code of honour was not social praxis but a manipulation of widespread subcultural codes intended to link mafiosi to the political elite who defended Sicilianist ideology. The stereotype of the mafioso is thus codified and diffused by the upper classes which ended up making the mafioso correspond to men of honour

¹¹⁶Pezzino, *Mafia*; Fabio Armao, *Il sistema mafia*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 2000.

and honour to the Sicilian cultural code, thus encouraging the identification of Sicilian with mafioso.¹¹⁷

According to Paolo Pezzino, the misleading interpretation that identified the mafia with the code of honour was due to political reasons. Furthermore, scholars long neglected 'the political origins of that stereotype.'¹¹⁸ In other words, the political elite artificially created the above model, which he called *paradigma dell'omertà*, in order to avoid identifying the mafia with a specific criminal association.¹¹⁹ This paradigm rose each time there was a transformation of the political system.

In my view, Pezzino's interpretation was reductive because it suffered from a unilateral historical approach, while neglecting anthropological insight. In other words, reducing the concept of honour in the mafia to an artificial creation of the elite led the analysis to overlook the empirical use of the concept, and thus prevented the understanding of the mentality informing mafia members and their women. This is not to deny the value of Pezzino's analysis, which provided scholars with new means to unmask the political pitfall that had led to attributing the mafia with characteristics belonging more to myth than reality. However, his pattern of analysis was risky in relation to our object of study because it neglected the female question in relation to the masculine code of honour, namely its onerous implications on women. That is why it is worth looking at the findings of anthropological studies from the 1960s and '70s, since we see some similarities between the mafia system and traditional society analysed at that time. Indeed the mafia society has in part remained similar to traditional society in respect to gender relations: the code of honour and shame resulted in discrimination against women.¹²⁰

Historian Salvatore Lupo's reflections were in line with Pezzino. Lupo wrote an article fifteen years after (2003) Pezzino's observations; yet he presented no new hypothesis,¹²¹ thus demonstrating that Italian scholars have not attempted to carry out new research on such delicate questions as the origins and persistence of the code of honour. Italian scholarship even neglects the recent debate going on within Mediterranean literature and also ignores the feminist perspective though early scholars on Mediterranean society

¹¹⁷AA.VV, *Onore e storia*, p. 18.

¹¹⁸Pezzino, 'Per una critica dell'onore mafioso. Mafia e codici culturali dal sicilianismo agli scienziati sociali, in Fiume, *Onore e storia*, p. 234.

¹¹⁹*ibid.*, pp. 234-235.

¹²⁰In analysing the code of honour in traditional society feminists Jill Dubish and Renee Hirschon pointed out that 'sequestrating', resulting from the male control over female body prescribed by the honour rules, equals 'oppression'. Albera, Blok and Bromberger, *L'anthropologie de la Méditerranée*, p. 116.

¹²¹Lupo, 'La mafia: definizione e uso di un modello virilista'.

have amply acknowledged its contribution to the conceptualisation of honour. Given the lack of research on this topic, we still had to refer to the early sociological and anthropological studies which analysed the code of honour in the mafia.¹²² Although not updated, these studies enabled us to understand the criminal association, in terms of attitude, behaviour and mentality. Apart from Catanzaro, their lack of information, due to the fact that they formulated their hypotheses before knowing the testimonies of *pentiti*, did not prevent them from making brilliant observations about the honour system in mafia areas of Sicily and Calabria. Of course, nowadays, we have the good fortune to be able to combine their early and valuable considerations with the testimonies of *pentiti*.¹²³

There is no doubt that calling a ruthless member of a criminal association *uomo d'onore* is paradoxical and raises questions. The traditional notion of honour (entailing generosity, altruism and greatness of soul) in theory has nothing in common with the mafia. However, it also encompasses the use of violence, either to protect land and women's integrity, or gain power and wealth. Therefore, it is not surprising that a criminal association, such as the mafia, borrowed the code of honour. What changed was the aim of the use of violence, shifting from noble to criminal purposes. Arlacchi warned us that honour in the mafia had less to do with justice than with domination and physical strength. So the mafia's instrumental use of the code of honour was meant to mask the criminal motivations related to power and money with honourable intentions in order to gain popular consensus. The explanation of such instrumental use of honour might also lie in the individual mafioso's attempt to justify his involvement in ruthless crimes. In other words, the honour alibi might be a technique of neutralization, enabling the mafioso to commit violent crimes like murder. The point that needs to be made here is not whether the code of honour was respected in the mafia or whether the mafiosi were really men of honour. Instead it is important to bear in mind that a certain notion of honour, conceptualised according to the mafia criteria of a 'good' reputation (entailing both the ability to murder and keep secrets, and 'correct' women's sexual behaviour),¹²⁴ influenced mafia membership.

Moreover, the mafia has enjoyed a certain real consensus based on its reputation as a *società d'onore* in areas where it is widely spread. Therefore it was not a casual stereotype,

¹²²Hess, *Mafia*; Blok, *The Mafia*; Schenider and Schneider, *Culture*, Arlacchi, *Mafia Business*; Catanzaro, *Men of Respect*, p. 3.

¹²³A balanced combination between early cultural approach and interpretations coming from the testimonies of *pentiti* is to be found in Girolamo Lo Verso and Franco Di Maria's work.

¹²⁴See Calderone's description of his initiation in Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia*, pp. 267-268.

because the ideology of honour theoretically informed mafia identity. Becoming a man of honour meant acquiring a specific identity associated with power and money. So for someone who felt anonymous in society and wanted to become somebody, mafia membership became a good opportunity to obtain social recognition. Many *pentiti* confessed that before becoming men of honour they felt they were '*nuddu ammiscatu con niente*' ('a nobody mixed with nothing'). The testimonies given to me by mafioso Vincenzo La Piana and 'Ndranghetista Vittorio Foschini were significant in this sense. Becoming a man of honour did not mean following the rule of conduct theoretically prescribed by the code of honour, which restricted sexual behaviour, i.e. no love relationships with the women of other mafia fellows, and no mistresses. In fact, in social practice, violations of the rules prescribed by the model were numerous. This, however, does not indicate that the code of honour is an artificial invention, as Pezzino maintains. In the mafia, the only valid rule is that convenience always prevails over ideology. In this sense, the film *Angela* by Roberta Torre, based on a true story, offers a good example. A young mafioso cannot tolerate the rules prescribed by the code of honour and so does not follow them and has an affair with the wife of his boss. However, he was not punished and was allowed to stay in the criminal group because he was clever and ruthless, and as such useful to the organisation. This logic is in line with what La Piana called *un ragionamento*. The matter crucial to our discussion is the fact that the rules of conduct prescribed by honour were strict only for women. Therefore let us focus on the relation between mafia women and the code of honour, which cannot be understood if scholars insist on considering the use of honour in the mafia as linked to a stereotypic image of the criminal organisation.¹²⁵

As seen above, a correspondence exists between mafia membership and attribution of honourability; and female sexual conduct is crucial to the attribution of honour. Indeed, women were indirectly involved in men's initiation into the mafia, because the traditional characteristics of a man of honour also include the ability to guarantee the sexual integrity of women (wife, daughter and sister). As seen in relation of traditional societies, women must show appropriate sexual behaviour, virginity before marriage and chastity afterwards, since this determines male prestige.¹²⁶ In this sense, women become a male vehicle for gaining a good reputation. As Gambetta has amply demonstrated, in his original, widely-

¹²⁵ An example of this tendency is to be found in Giovanni Raffaele, 'Il concetto di onore in alcune tipologie criminali nella Sicilia rurale dell'Ottocento', in Fiume, *Onore e storia*, p. 207.

¹²⁶ Cicconte, *'Ndrangheta*, p. 17.

cited thesis on the mafia as an industry selling protection, reputation was important in an environment dominated by a traditional lack of protection and risky economic transactions. In fact, by showing his ability to protect female sexuality from other men, a mafioso proved his ability in protection and thereby increased his reputation, which 'had to be maintained as much within the neighbourhood as within the mafia.' Moreover, if we consider that 'reputation, (...), was an elusive asset and could not be assessed per se.' and so 'it was attached to more visible items that become symbols of it., women became fundamental for testing both reputation for toughness and reliability.' Indeed, 'to have one's women respected meant strength whereas to respect them and be faithful to one's one wife meant reliability.'¹²⁷ That is why Gambetta defined honour as '(...) the reputation for supplying credible protection'¹²⁸ Indeed, 'a protector who cannot protect his wife (or protect himself from his wife) and whatever else is deemed honourable in a given society would not be credible (...). This is due to the fact that, partly because of the risk of fraud, reputation cannot easily disengage itself from a real protector and come to reside in abstract trademarks.'¹²⁹

In remembering earlier times in Palermo, Vincenzo La Piana told me that honour was important in the 1960s. At that time, for example, women were not allowed to open the door if a man knocked and they were alone in the house:

Here is the kind of honour there was once... if the woman was at home, she was part of the *onorata società*. The woman had to stay only at home and if I knocked on the door and her husband was not there, she didn't open it, "Can't you see he's not here, he's not here" and you went away, she didn't let you in, sure this is something taboo but that's the way it was... and how it's changed, people who you only saw their eyes like Arabs, really no? Now it's completely different, before we really believed in honour because a man of honour had to be a man of honour because if he even had a sister who had abandoned or betrayed her husband, the mafia kept away from him and wouldn't make him.¹³⁰

In reading La Piana's testimony it is necessary to take into consideration that he showed his ideal image of the mafia by insisting that in the past mafiosi were real men of honour, unlike nowadays. Nevertheless, it is true that women in the mafia were strictly controlled in the past. And this is still the case in the present, as emerged not only from the accounts of Padre Garau and the former mayor of Corleone, Giuseppe Cipriani, but also from

¹²⁷Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia*, p. 269.

¹²⁸*ibid.*, p. 40. For the use of reputation in the mafia industry see *ibid.*, pp. 119-12.

¹²⁹*ibid.*, p. 45.

¹³⁰Interview with Vincenzo La Piana, Bologna, 2 April 2004.

mafiosi themselves. While in the legitimate world, patriarchal control over women depends on social, economic and educational conditions; in the mafia, it seems to be always the case. La Piana's comments on this topic were interesting. He underlined that while in the legitimate world women currently experience a certain degree of liberty - "Nowadays they go out to discos, pubs; they have their own keys; they have no schedule; they go off and live on their own", they are quite controlled in mafia families - "Is it still like that today in mafia families? Still like that today?... till I was... there were families who when they saw somebody said, 'Isn't that the daughter of so and so'... word spread, it was something strange to see the daughter of the guy who was a mafia boss... "What are you doing here? Go home!"-.¹³¹

Another typical control over women was that exercised by members of the organisations over the wives of imprisoned mafiosi, whose families depended economically on the criminal organisation.¹³² Women thus became properties of the mafia association. Needless to say, it is much more frustrating to experience a pre-modern condition in modern times than in pre-modern times. Though this may seem banal, it is quite important in understanding the condition of some women in the mafia where the clash between their self-condition and the collective-condition is jarring.

Other examples of gender discrimination stemming from the ideology of honour are the conditions of widows. There are many cases of widows compelled to remain faithful to their dead husbands or even their dead fiancés. The latter was the case of Arcangela Riina, Totò Riina's sister, engaged to Calogero Bagarella, murdered during the '*strage di Viale Lazio*' in the 1960s. Behind the prohibition on other love relationships lies the fear of losing the family honour. *Pentito* Saverio Morabito reported the case of Papalia, who found a solution against the risk in terms of honour caused by having a widow in the family:

The widow of Papalia, killed by a friend (because of a vendetta)... was later married by one of the dead man's brothers, Domenico Papalia. He married her because she was a widow with a daughter and there in Platì would never have found anybody who would have married her; who is going to marry a woman that already has a kid? Nobody, because the mentality is that everybody wants a virgin bride... But if a woman becomes a widow while she's still young, either she finds somebody who'll remarry her immediately, and that is difficult, or she just runs wild; she's at the mercy of anybody, and all those vultures circle around her till everybody is talking

¹³¹*ibid.*

¹³²Interview with Vittorio Foschini, Modena, 4 May 2004.

about it. So to avoid that kind of thing happening in their family, they decided that Domenico Papalia would marry the widow. It's all part of ancient customs....¹³³

Even Vincenzo La Piana spoke about this practice: 'There were people whose husband had died and they had to remain like my mother-in-law, my ex-mother-in-law now... her husband was dead and she couldn't even look at another man...'.¹³⁴

As revealed by most studies on Mediterranean codes, the consequences of female loss of honour fall upon manliness. Similarly, in the mafia female sexual behaviour conditioned male careers. Indicative in this sense is the story of Margherita Petraia. *Pentito* Francesco Milano, a soldier for Margherita's husband, Gaspare Sugamiele, in charge of following and controlling Margherita, told judges:

At the beginning of the 1980s, Vito and Gaspare Sugamiele were "put in their place" because of decisions made on the provincial level following the fact they had not taken radical steps in regards to Gaspare's wife, Margherita Petralia, who was responsible for an extra-conjugal relation that had come to public knowledge following a check made by Carabinieri at Sugamiele's house on which occasion the woman was caught by surprise in the company of her lover.¹³⁵

Once again a correspondence existed between masculine honour and the purity of women. Becoming a cuckold is the worst offence for a man. The consequences of the loss of honour due to female betrayal of the rules of honour were so serious that women were controlled and sometimes segregated. Some scholars assert that the fact that male honour depends upon female behaviour gives women power. On the contrary, this thesis has demonstrated that women were passive objects within the ideology of honour. Remembering their passiveness becomes important particularly in relation to the revisionist approach to the study of women in Southern Italy that tends to overemphasise real female power behind their apparent weakness. The risk beyond this new approach lies in forgetting the strict social control women were compelled to experience in such a culture, not only from men but also from women themselves on behalf of men, such as the mother-in-law.

¹³³ Colaprico, Fazzo, *Manager calibro 9*, pp. 98-99.

¹³⁴ Interview with Vincenzo La Piana, Bologna, 2 April 2004.

¹³⁵ Corte d'Assise di Trapani, Sent. Nr. 4/2001 del 17.05.2001.

4.4. *Passive function: 'objects' in arranged marriages*

Studies of the history of marriage agree that arranged marriage was a common practice in the past.¹³⁶ Gradually, matrimonial union has increasingly become a matter of companionship rather than business. Nowadays, in some contexts and cultures, it has remained more of a utilitarian union grounded on relatives' calculations rather than sincere love.

In Mediterranean societies, marriages were prescribed by kinship groups and related in terms of honour and shame, hence the importance of virginity. As Jack Goody put it, 'the Mediterranean stress on virginity has also to be seen in the context of the control of marriages by kin, who are more concerned with contracting a union which is "honourable" than one based on the agreement, choice or love of the partners.'¹³⁷ The Arab world has influenced Mediterranean societies' consideration of the union between the sexes as a matrimonial alliance, as Guichard explained in his study of oriental versus occidental structure in Medieval Spain.

Generally speaking, in Sicily and Calabria great importance has been given to kinship, including not only blood relationship but also bonds between in-laws and *comparatrico* (godparenthood). The latter were sealed by marriage, which was intended to build bonds through blood that, as anthropologists teach us, 'is culturally associated with virginity and procreation, and therefore also imbues the bonds between in-laws.' Anthropologist Maria Minicuci in her study on a Calabrian village found out that marriages between cousins were meant to strengthen the family.¹³⁸ Even Vincenzo Masini's work on the traditional Sicilian family reported marriages between cousins, typical of the oriental structure observed by Goody. Masini observed that the high percentage of weddings between cousins permitted the stabilisation of family groups, with patrimonial family relations, because the wives were recruited from within the same family group.¹³⁹ Blood alliance became more fundamental in a risky context such as the mafia where untrustworthiness and uncertainty dominated everyday life. Widened by marriage, trusted kinship between mafia families, sharing the same 'values', acted as a sort of defence against external

¹³⁶For a broad history of marriage in Europe see Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983.

¹³⁷*ibid.*, p. 213.

¹³⁸Maria Minicuci, *Qui e altrove. Famiglie di Calabria e di Argentina*, Franco Angeli, Milan, 1994, pp. 246-247.

¹³⁹Masini, *Sociologia di Sagunto*, pp. 150-151.

attacks.¹⁴⁰In this sense prescribed marriage (in Sicilian '*matrimonio portato*')¹⁴¹in the mafia aimed at making an alliance between two mafia clans in order to expand their control over a given territory thus increasing their power. Pino Arlacchi defined the practice of combined marriage within mafia families as *endogamia di ceto*, meaning, 'the use of the female branch of the mafia family for the purpose of expanding the dimensions of the *cosca* (Family) via the activation of matrimonial alliances with territorially closer mafia groups.'¹⁴²There are many examples of this; a significant one was the case of the important 'Ndrangheta families Condello and Imerti. These families made alliances through cross-marriages in order to confront the powerful De Stefano family during the previously mentioned war in the area surrounding Reggio Calabria from 1985 to 1991. These kinds of marriage also reduced the probabilities of feud, as *pentito* Saverio Morabito mentioned in talking about his Calabrian village, Platì.

...often families crossed through marriages...intermarriages were useful in maintaining the peace in Platì, which in fact is the only town where no feud has ever broken out. It is a little like what happened in royal families. The families from Platì – Seri, Papalia, Barbaro, Perri- are all related to each other now; daughters and sons get married, they become *compari*; they become relatives through cousins, second and third cousins. So everybody knows that if a feud breaks out, it would immediately involve all of them, and so before avenging anybody they think about it three times.¹⁴³

In Palmi, a village on the Ionian coast, these kinship combinations made criminal investigations difficult since relatives often have the same names and surnames, as well as many physical similarities.¹⁴⁴According to Prosecutor Nicola Gratteri, not only does intermarriage in small communities such as Platì and Africo create difficulties for investigators in identifying criminals, but it is also the main reason for the presence of numerous people with disabilities.¹⁴⁵

Moving from 'Ndrangheta to Cosa Nostra, I shall examine two examples which are interesting because one concerns the so-called traditional mafia and the other the so-called new mafia. The division between traditional mafia and modern mafia is misleading, yet unfortunately a widespread belief. These cases demonstrate that the custom of arranged

¹⁴⁰Blok, *Honour and Violence*, p. 89.

¹⁴¹Cutrufelli, *Disoccupata con onore*, p. 80.

¹⁴²Arlacchi, *Mafia Business*, p. 140.

¹⁴³Colaprico, Fazzo, *Manager calibro 9*, p. 100.

¹⁴⁴Enzo Ciconte, *Processo alla 'Ndrangheta*, p.26; Interview with Public Prosecutor Nicola Gratteri, Reggio Calabria, 16 September 2003.

¹⁴⁵*ibid.*

marriage is common in both mafias, thus providing another reason to refuse the supposed differences. The first example refers to the Greco's, one of the families in the Conca d'Oro, whose progress from trafficking citrus fruits to narcotics was helped in part by reinforcement through strategic intermarriages between the Greco family from Croceverdi Giardini and the Greco family from Ciaculli. Through these alliances, they became one of the leading mafia families in the fifties and sixties.

The second example takes into account the saga of the Riina and Bagarella families, which formed the fulcrum of the Corleonese faction.¹⁴⁶ Totò Riina, the so-called 'boss of bosses', wanted to marry Ninetta Bagarella, so he offered Ninetta's brother, Calogero Bagarella, his own sister Arcangela in exchange. Before Arcangela and Calogero's marriage was celebrated, Calogero was shot dead in the so-called *strage di viale Lazio* in 1969. As seen in the previous section, Totò forced his own sister to remain faithful to Calogero because of his promise to him. Well-acquainted with mafia culture, journalists Giuseppe D'Avanzo and Attilio Bolzoni wrote about the Riina-Bagarella intermarriage in their book on Totò Riina: 'Two intermarriages to seal the ties between the two families with a bond as sacred as an oath. It was something stronger than love; it was a pact for life. Two families became one great single family. It was the seal of highest fidelity.'¹⁴⁷ There is no doubt that the Corleonesi's rise to power, analysed in the chapter three, was due to their ruthlessness, but their criminal-business unity was also enhanced by the cohesion from their constructed kinship. This shows to what extent cultural aspects of the mafia were strictly interwoven with the functioning of the criminal structure of the organisation. Ninetta's union with Totò was not only strategic, but was apparently characterized by love. This can be referred to what Goody observed: 'the opposition between duty and choice does not imply the total absence of love in those cases where marriage is subject to parental constraints or societal preferences. "Love" is not incompatible with arranged union'.¹⁴⁸ Speculations about this marriage, along with the honeymoon in Venice while Totò was on the run, fed Italian curiosity for a long time. Moreover, the Riina case offers us firm ground to state that, in the Cosa Nostra, even matrilineal relations are meant to build alliances. For instance, Giuseppe Marchese became a close lieutenant of Riina because he was the brother of Vincenzina, wife of Leoluca Bagarella, brother of Ninetta,

¹⁴⁶For the genealogical tree of Riina-Bagarella family see Blok, *Honour and Violence*, p. 68.

¹⁴⁷Bolzoni- D'Avanzo, *Il capo dei capi. Vita e carriera criminale di Totò Riina*, Mondadori, Milano, 1993, pp. 30-31.

¹⁴⁸Goody, *The Development*, p. 214.

Riina's wife. There have also been examples, in the case where mafia power was inherited, 'the position of leadership may also be transferred matrilineally.'¹⁴⁹ This was the case of Salvatore Inzerillo who took over a powerful clan at the end of the career of Rosario Di Maggio, his maternal uncle. In this family there were also unions between cousins in order to strengthen kinship and criminal bonds as much as possible. This was noted by Giovanni Falcone who wrote in the report starting the inquiry leading to the 'maxi-trial' that the 'incredible interlacing of kinship ties...with each new generation, the links become more binding as a consequence of marriages between cousins (...) render the group more cohesive and homogeneous'.¹⁵⁰ According to *pentito* Vincenzo La Piana, this custom is still widespread in the Sicilian mafia, as seen by the example of his son who was about to marry the daughter of boss Gerlando Alberti, his wife's uncle.¹⁵¹

Arranged marriage, encompassing the sacrifice of individual feelings for the sake of the family, is in line with what is supported within this thesis, the instrumental use of kinships in the mafia.¹⁵² The practice seems to constitute a constriction for both sexes. Upon closer analysis, it is clear that unwished, yet strategic union has advantageous results for men, but not for women. Indeed men's sacrifice helped improve their own mafia career, whereas women's sacrifice helped the career of the men in their families. Mafia boss Leonardo Messina affirmed he was a man of honour not only because of heritage, but also because he married 'a woman from my environment, niece of the *sottocapo* of the San Cataldo Family, so I was destined to become an important person in this town and in some way I became one.'¹⁵³ One good example of an alliance between clans through the sacrifice of the woman was that of Grazia Ribisi, mentioned previously in relation to Grazia's vengeful actions. Grazia's marriage to boss Allegro was meant to create a useful alliance for her brothers' clan. Indeed, Grazia 'constituted the element of connection between her family and that of Allegro.'¹⁵⁴ This discrimination against women in arranged marriages becomes clear when considering that in many cases men keep seeing their true loves after their investment in a 'good' marriage. Having a mistress is often tolerated, despite the fact that it goes against mafia norms.¹⁵⁵ For example, Francesco Marino Mannoia married the daughter

¹⁴⁹Blok, *Honour and Violence*, p. 90.

¹⁵⁰Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents*, p.197.

¹⁵¹Interview with Vincenzo La Piana, Bologna, 2 April 2004.

¹⁵²Siebert, *Secrets of Life*, p. 29.

¹⁵³Part of Leonardo Messina's confession to the antimafia commission is quoted in Pezzino, *Mafia*, p. 281.

¹⁵⁴Principato, Dino, *Mafia Donna*, p. 54.

¹⁵⁵See the previous section of this chapter.

of important mafia boss Vernengo in order to improve his position. However, he did not give up seeing his first love, Rita Simoncini, with whom he would finally reunite in 1989 when he began collaborating with magistrates. His feelings for Rita probably played an important role in deciding to turn state's evidence.

To conclude, arranged marriage attributed a passive role to women as objects of exchange. This submissive female function is even more evident in cases when prescribed marriage is used to make peace between clans after a feud. In this case the blood of virginity the bride yields to her husband during the wedding night balances metaphorically with the blood shed in warfare. Moreover, this 'sealed the pact of not provoking new deaths between families already related and linked by a blood tie.'¹⁵⁶ Anthropologists have found that this purpose of combined marriage is true for other cultures as well. Among the Bedouin, for instance, the shedding of the blood of a virgin given to settle a feud was seen as a kind of symbolic vengeance, blood for blood'.¹⁵⁷ Or in Barbagia, Sardinia, 'the most typical form of reconciliation is marriage of a man from the clan of the victim with a woman from the clan of the killer. The virginal blood that is spilled in fact presents a symbolic compensation for the blood spilled in the homicide that preceded it.'¹⁵⁸

Another function of prescribed marriages organised by mafia families has to do with their aim to enter the legitimate world by offering their daughter, along with her sizeable dowry, to a family (often noble) with a clear name but financial difficulties.

Finally, Family alliances have been fundamental in transforming the mafia into a trans-national organisation. The Italian mafia is competitive in the global criminal market partly because of strong kinship bonds at the local level.¹⁵⁹

In concluding this section, it is worth emphasising that the most important result of matrimonial strategy is the perpetuation and enhancement of mafia ideology. In this regard, exogamy would be risky because it would bring a destabilizing foreign element into the compactness of mafia organisation. According to Lo Verso, marriage was fundamental for the nourishment of what he calls *psichismo mafioso* ('mafia psychism'). One of the main strengths of *psichismo mafioso* that gave a high level of cohesion to the organisation and contributed to making it really Cosa Nostra ('this Thing of Ours') was making the

¹⁵⁶Cicone, *Ndrangheta*, p. 38.

¹⁵⁷Stephen Wilson, *Feuding, Conflict and Banditry in Nineteenth-Century Corsica*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988.

¹⁵⁸Cagnetta Franco, *Bandits d'Orgosolo*, 1954, quoted in Blok, *Honour and Violence*, p. 95.

¹⁵⁹Blok, *Honour and Violence*, p. 89.

biological family correspond broadly with the social and affective family through widespread marriage within the organisation, thereby following the centuries-old example of the aristocracy. 'In the mafia world, the internal family (the psychic), the family of marriage, the original family, and the mafia family, all ended up almost coinciding, thus creating a cohesion and "fundamentalist" psychic totalisation, and thus based on the rigid affective foundation of individuality'.¹⁶⁰ Where mafia ties coincide with those of blood, people rarely turn state's evidence. In order to avoid *pentitismo*, a strategic closing of the boundaries with the external world through marriage between mafia families was employed. It would be interesting to know if the mafia responded to the spread of *pentitismo* in the 1990s with increasing numbers of arranged marriages within mafia families in order to strengthen blood loyalties. A sign of this strategy might be the 'engagement' in June 2002 between Salvatore Riina, Totò Riina's son, and Maria Concetta, daughter of Ninetta Bagarella's cousin.¹⁶¹ What is sure is that the Riina-Bagarella family tree keeps 'expanding internally'.

As a conclusion to this section, we might state that mafia culture has maintained many traditional aspects thanks to the tight transmission allowed by the persistence of *endogamia di ceto*, as much as has occurred in other social environments in the legitimate world in terms of cultural transmission.

¹⁶⁰Lo Verso, *La mafia dentro*, p. 28.

¹⁶¹*la Repubblica*, 6 Giugno 2002.

CHAPTER FIVE

Active Role: the Lady Boss

Introduction

Changes in female participation in the mafia involved two processes: the real modification of women's functions within the criminal associations and the emergence of a hidden reality due to the change in the criminal justice system's perspective towards mafia women. This chapter focuses on those factors contributing to the transformation of female involvement in the mafia from the domestic to the business realm, while the next chapter will explore the latter process in relation to the perception of female criminality within society.

One aspect influencing the transformation was the general change in women's conditions in the greater world, analysed in chapter two. As Anna Puglisi observed: 'The mafia is a male chauvinist organisation, however its male chauvinism mirrors that of the social context (...). The mafia adapts itself to a context within which the role of women has grown, regardless of ethical considerations on the nature and modality of gender relationships.'¹In particular, it must be considered that the change in gender expectations within society, resulting in women adopting behaviours traditionally considered male, also embraced criminal activities.

The second aspect that must be considered in relation to the increasing inclusion of women in mafia activities is the transformation of the mafia itself described in chapter three. During the 1970s, the mafia started to expand its activities by shifting them from trafficking tobacco to smuggling drugs and weapons, while at the same time expanding operations outside of Italy. The drug trade in particular opened up job opportunities for women as it required activities that could be practiced at home, such as packaging and hiding bags of drugs, or receiving stolen goods. Women were considered useful in the drug trade since their being female made them inconspicuous and less likely to be discovered by the police during the transportation of drugs.

¹Anna Puglisi, *Donne, mafia e antimafia*, CSD appunti , Quaderni 7-8 del Centro Impastato, Palermo, 1998, p.30.

After a brief historical digression on female involvement in the mafia, this chapter will analyse the stories of particular women working in the drug business across all levels of the organisation. Secondly, it will take into account stories of women whose names were used in establishing front companies and registering property and bank accounts, since women generally had no criminal records and were less monitored. It will also deal with stories of women engaged in more sophisticated functions related to money laundering. The last section is concerned with female participation inside the mafia core, ranging from acting as couriers between bosses to running mafia clans. Since the late 1980s, leadership positions in the mafia have also been delegated to women. As repeatedly seen throughout women's history, the taking over of traditional male jobs has arisen out of emergency and necessity. As described in chapter two, the Italian government has fought organized crime more efficiently since the mid-1980s, and consequently many mafia bosses were captured and others forced to live on the run, which caused a depletion in the ranks of the organisation. Subsequently, the association needed to recruit not only more people but above all trustworthy people, able and willing to fill the 'vacancies' created at the top of the criminal association. As a result, many women became mafia bosses on behalf of their male family members (husbands, brothers or fathers).

To explain female entry into mafia organisation, some observers have used the categories of power syndicate and enterprise syndicate, created by the American criminologist Alan Blok, to explain American organised crime in the 1930s. Historian Salvatore Lupo applied Blok's theory to the Palermo equivalent, where the 'power syndicate', whose aim was to control the territory, was represented by the mafia's hierarchic structure and its consequent stability over the time. This was achieved through violence and intimidation, as practiced by the *guardiania* in the past, by using violent control on large estates, and, in modern times, by the *pizzo* -extortion of money from shopkeepers on a regular basis. The 'enterprise syndicate', constituting the accumulation of money through a variety of illegal businesses, in the Sicilian mafia has incorporated a wide variety of illegal operations: from 19th century *abigeato* (cattle rustling) and trafficking in contraband citrus fruit and cigarettes, to the narcotics trade. In the enterprise syndicate, 'the network did not consist entirely of Sicilian mafiosi: there were Tunisians, Americans,

Neapolitans, Marseilles, Chinese, men of honour, men of dishonour, the bankrupt and bankers.'²

According to Renate Siebert, who used Lupo's framework, although women were not admitted to the power syndicate, the hard core of the secret mafia organisation, they could join the economic and financial branches of the enterprise syndicate on an individual basis, as easily as any other outsider.³ In my view, the above distinction only helps us explain the entry into the mafia of people not formally affiliated, yet who were needed by the mafia to cope with the expansion of the network of activities comprising the enterprise syndicate. Thus, I consider, this interpretive model reductive because the explanation does not embrace cases of women who were already inside the mafia, including the relatives (particularly sisters) of men composing the power syndicate. As we will discuss later, these women were allowed to enter the power syndicate in times of crisis, notwithstanding their ordinary exclusion. To thoroughly understand the discussion of women 'internal to the mafia', the reader should be reminded of what has been stressed throughout this thesis, that is the definition of the mafia not only through the notion of organised crime but also by examining its cultural structure. In other words, it is essential to consider those parts of the mafia system that included traditional female roles, which were not as criminal as they were structural.⁴ As the following chapters will demonstrate, those women who belonged to the cultural structure were likely to enter the criminal structure not only in the enterprise syndicate but also, if needed, the power syndicate. On the contrary, women who were external to the cultural structure entered the criminal structure only on the lower tiers of the organisation. At this level, discrimination against women was evident since women could not aspire to undertake a career within the power syndicate reserved exclusively for men, and in emergencies only women already part of the cultural structure, were employed. Whereas men entering the criminal structure at the bottom could hope to be affiliated with the mafia and consequently reach the power syndicate, even though they began as external to the cultural structure.

Finally, when reading the following chapter it is essential to keep in mind that the modality of women's participation varied according to family background, class origin and individual-personal characteristics. Here, however, it is necessary to generalise by creating

²Lupo, *Storia della mafia*, p.193. The translation is borrowed from Longrigg, *Mafia Women*, p.149.

³Siebert, *Secrets of Life*, p.117.

⁴See the introduction of chapter four.

ideal-types to describe female functions. Three kinds of criminal activities -the drug trade, financial activities and leadership positions- will be presented with an increasing degree of female involvement from the bottom to the top.

5. 1. *Active role in the past*

By the 1970s, women were mainly present in those activities tied to the private sphere, yet a few cases existed of women involved in the mafia beyond traditional roles. In relation to the 'Ndrangheta, Enzo Ciconte uncovered trial documents, dated at the turn of the last century, testifying that women took part in illegal mafia operations by disguising themselves as men.⁵

In regard to the Sicilian mafia, the story of Giuseppina Salvo in Andalonga, popularly known as *La Cagnazza*, became famous in the Fascist period when she was arrested during the Gangi siege organised by Prefetto Mori.⁶ Marina Pino told her story by gathering documents from the trial called the *processo alla mafia delle Madonie* ('trial of the mafia of the Madonie'), held between 1927 and 1928 after the siege, in which Giuseppina was one of seven women out of 153 men charged with mafia involvement.⁷ These documents showed that the '*Regina di Gangi*' ('Queen of Gangi'), as the Fascist media called her, displayed a mafioso attitude during the trial.⁸ At the time she was writing her book (in the late 1980s), Marina Pino attempted to interview people in Gangi in order to investigate recollections of this story, however they curiously refused to talk.

In Palermo during the late 1940s, women from the Greco family were involved in a feud against the Amone family, resulting in Antonina Greco murdering Francesco Amone in revenge for her husband's murder. The fight involved one of the daughters of Greco and Francesco Amone's sister.⁹ Another interesting story discovered by Anna Puglisi was that of Maria Grazia Genova, known as Maragè, from the small Sicilian town of Delia. Maria Grazia, sister of 'man of honour' Diego Genova, dealt with mafia business, and was charged on almost 50 occasions and arrested 22 times. In 1949, she was involved in a feud between her family and the Corbo and Ferrante families, during which her son and two nephews died. The police finally captured her, but she managed to escape from prison. In

⁵Ciconte, *Processo alla 'Ndrangheta*, p. 38. Ciconte, *'Ndrangheta*, p.81. Interview with Enzo Ciconte, Rome, 18 September 2003.

⁶For the historical context see the section Fascism of chapter two of this thesis.

⁷Marina Pino, *La regina di Ganci*, unpublished manuscript. Anna Puglisi, *Donne, mafia e antimafia*, p. 74.

⁸Siragusa Mario, Seminara Giuseppina, *Società e mafia nella Gangi liberale e fascista*, Edizioni Progetto Ganci, Ganci, 1996, p.110.

⁹Puglisi, *Donne, mafia e antimafia*, p.62.

the early 1960s, she was sent into internal exile, and in 1979, was condemned again to *soggiorno obbligato*.¹⁰

In the early 1970s, Luciano Liggio's sister, Maria Antonietta, who was 63 years old, was sent into *soggiorno obbligato* because she bought some land with her brother's illegal earnings.¹¹

In 1971, Palermo Prosecutor Vincenzo Terranova asked the court to send Antonietta Bagarella to Northern Italy for four years since she was considered dangerous after being discovered communicating between her fiancé, Totò Riina, and the boss of bosses, Luciano Liggio, both fugitives. According to the accusation, 'she had to leave Corleone in order to interrupt her activity in support of Luciano Liggio's *cosca*'.¹² In a famous interview given to journalist Mario Francese at that time, Ninetta denied her role and declared she was just a woman in love.¹³ Ninetta followed Totò Riina into hiding soon after her appearance in court.¹⁴

The above short list of stories shows us that even in the past women were involved in the mafia. There are probably other similar stories that remain invisible to history. We will address the reasons for such invisibility in the next chapter. Once again, women's history proves to be a difficult field for inquiry due to the limited availability of sources. Nevertheless, there is sufficient ground to sustain that in the past there was a lower presence of women in the mafia compared to modern times. The further increase in female involvement was mainly due to the expansion of the drug business. It is to this illegal trade that we now turn our analysis.

5. 2. *Drug trafficking: from couriers to managers*

As examined in chapter two, increasing drug consumption since the 1970s has modified criminal businesses in most European countries.¹⁵ In Italy, the new drug business forced 'men of honour' to form new alliances and set up partnerships with 'ordinary' men, sometimes even neophytes. The recruitment of an army of unskilled criminal labour, who were inexperienced and vulnerable, contributed to a process of

¹⁰*ibid.*, p.62.

¹¹Cutrufelli, *Disoccupata con onore*, p.67.

¹²*Il Giornale di Sicilia*, 27-7-1971.

¹³*ibid.*

¹⁴*ibid.*

¹⁵For a detailed analysis of the development of Italian drugs market in relation to the mafia, Ruggiero, *Crime and Markets*, p.17.

disorganization.¹⁶ According to statistical data concerning the last three decades, female crime has grown more in drug-related crimes than any other type of offence. An inquiry into the drug economy from a gender perspective is not the purpose of this thesis. However, attention will be directed to a few cases of women involved in drug trafficking as couriers, dealers and managers, in connection with the mafia.¹⁷ As journalist Salvo Palazzolo explained to me, during the last two decades the structure of the Sicilian mafia in terms of managing the drug trade has been more and more characterized by a certain autonomy of the single Families.¹⁸ As this thesis has argued, the less hierarchical the organisation, the more women participate. The area surrounding Siracusa is emblematic in this respect, characterised by a loose drug trade that is completely entrusted to women who organise it on family-based terms.¹⁹

5.2.1 *Drug couriers and dealers*

Following the expansion of the drug trade to meet rising demand during the 1970s, mafia organisations started to employ women, as part of the general increase in recruiting workers, since it was immediately evident women were useful because of their inconspicuousness. Carrying bags of drugs was a particularly suitable job for women since they could conceal them by pretending to be pregnant or by rounding out their figures.²⁰ As early as the beginning of the 20th century, women were used as couriers of illegal goods; certain women, called *femminote*, transported smuggled salt from Sicily to Calabria by concealing it beneath their wide black skirts.²¹ Other jobs related to small-scale distribution of drugs and those practicable in the household, such as repackaging drugs or receiving stolen goods, were particularly suitable for women. Undoubtedly,

... the living room and the home are perfect places for organizing trafficking, and are places where women hold sway. Pushing, dealing small quantities, demands the existence of a tight localized network, well camouflaged by countless everyday activities: markets, street corners, the hubbub of small shops and, yet again, the

¹⁶*ibid.*, p.25.

¹⁷See chronology on [www. Cds.it](http://www.Cds.it). Another interesting case of drug courier is that of Rosalia Verde from Castelvetro. She brought drug in train travelling with a mafioso disguised as a priest hiding a gun under the priest vest. In January 1993 she was accused with taking part into a mafia association led by the boss Messina. After being on the run for two years, she was arrested in 1995.

¹⁸Interview with journalist Salvo Palazzolo, Palermo, 8 October 2002.

¹⁹See *Operazione Dinasty*, *la Repubblica*, 10/12/2000.

²⁰Marina Pino, *Le signore della droga*, La Luna, Palermo, 1998.

²¹*ibid.*, p. 7.

home. Who better than the housewife and mother of a large family to take on this new kind of “work from home”²²

The selection of stories told by journalist Marina Pino, in her pioneering book *Le signore della droga*, will be considered here because they provide us with good examples of women who, external to the mafia, entered it by occupying the lower ranks of the drug economy.²³ Their stories also take up the crucial issue concerning mafia exploitation of people in financial difficulties. Marina Pino’s stories of drug couriers concerned a group of housewives from Torretta, a poor area near Palermo, who in 1982 were employed by the mafia organisation to run drugs from Palermo to New York. Throughout the journey, the transported drugs were taped to their bodies and doused with perfume in order to deceive sniffer dogs.²⁴

It is not surprising that such a risky job was given to middle-aged women with a clean record because they were beyond any suspicion and, as such, unlikely to be monitored by police at the airport.²⁵ Women were immediately chosen as couriers because they were more secure. In fact, easily searching all the passengers at the airport is unthinkable since the airport is packed as a bus. That is unless the tip-off is as precise as a picture or an identity card. Then, an available police assistant, a policewoman, has to be found in the airport there, somebody who can put their hands under women’s skirts.²⁶

As we will discuss in the next chapter, the above attitude of investigators can be read through the approach suggested by the chivalry thesis. The use of women due to their potential for hiding drugs was quite common both in the ‘Ndrangheta and Cosa Nostra, as confirmed by two male ex-bosses I met.²⁷ In the beginning, they tended to avoid discussing such female involvement because the use of women in these activities brought shame to the clan. Later when I asked them indirect questions, they ended up telling me stories of women carrying drugs or money. Moreover, they pointed out they used women because they were unlikely to be body searched by police.

Let us return to the stories of the *casalinghe* from Torretta, who wore bags containing heroin, tailor-made by a female dressmaker to be attached to the body. They were made ‘inside of a thin plastic membrane, and outside a piece of cloth to soak up the body’s

²²Siebert, *Secrets of Life*, p. 131.

²³Pino, *Le signore della droga*, p. 8.

²⁴*ibid.*, p.14.

²⁵*ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁶*ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁷Interviews with Vincenzo La Piana, and Vittorio Foschini.

sweat.’²⁸ After being loaded with drugs in a residence close to the airport, the housewife-couriers flew to New York where they handed off the heroin to a member of the organisation who then, after 15 days, loaded them up with money via the same method as the outbound journey. For their part in the operation the women were paid £12,500 – take into consideration that these event occurred in mid 1980s.²⁹

The above methods of carrying drugs and money were inhumane; both wearing the bags and their removal were quite painful. More than once it was almost impossible to undress the couriers. This happened to Anna Cordovino, who, on her return from the US, was put under boiling water because the bags had become so badly stuck to her body. She was eventually freed but the boiling water caused serious burns.³⁰ Furthermore, these women were sexually abused by the men who prepared them for travel. As one of these men confessed to the Public Prosecutor: ‘Before dressing them, I had sex with them.’³¹ The same ‘sexual procedure’ occurred on arrival in New York.³² Investigations started with a tip-off, revealing the ‘clever’ way drugs and money were transported. Then police arrested a male courier who told them most of the couriers came from Torretta and the man in charge of loading the women with drugs was Salvatore Allegra.³³ Soon, Allegra confessed his involvement, the operations of the traffic, and, relevant to this thesis, admitted the organisation chose to employ women because ‘the transport runs less risk if carried out by women.’³⁴ Allegra’s words confirmed the suspicions aroused from an intercepted telephone call by the son of one of the involved housewives, Vincenza Cali, saying: ‘Mamma’s going to America and she is going to bring back dollars.’³⁵ On 24 May 1986, Vincenza was arrested at the airport and, in 1988, charged with drug smuggling. In September 1992, Clare Longrigg met Piera Mattiolo, Vincenza’s daughter, who justified her mother’s actions by saying: ‘We were in real financial trouble before my mother went to America. She did it for us, to give us a chance to study, give us a better life.’³⁶

Dwelling upon the details of these stories is intended to stress the victimisation of women at the bottom of the criminal organisation, confirming the argument that runs

²⁸Pino, *Le signore della droga*, p. 21.

²⁹Longrigg, *Mafia Women*, p. 133.

³⁰*ibid.* p. 15.

³¹Pino, *Le signore della droga*, p. 9.

³²*ibid.*, p. 16.

³³*ibid.*, p. 10 and p. 13.

³⁴*ibid.*, p. 14.

³⁵Longrigg, *Mafia Women*, p. 134.

³⁶*ibid.*, p. 135.

throughout this work. All the women involved in the drug trafficking as discussed above shared the common ground of women from poor areas of Palermo with many children, struggling to '*tirare fino alla fine del mese* ('make it to the end of the month'). It is not surprising they took the chance of making money very quickly by accepting the work offered by the mafia. In the light of the above consideration, I would suggest reading their experiences through the marginalisation and anomie theories explained in chapter one. The reasons behind illegal actions stemmed both from extreme financial need (marginalisation theory) and from experiencing a gap between the goals proposed by society and the means available to achieve them (anomie/strain theory). Earning money through carrying drugs, a crime easy to commit because the victim is not visible, was aimed at reducing the frustration coming from that gap. This was clearly demonstrated by the way they spent the money, which was not invested but rather used to buy superficial consumer goods advertised on television. So the women's family conditions did not necessarily improve. Marginalisation and anomie theories can be verified by Vincenzina's statements expressing her need for money to pay bills and her wish for money to beautify the house. At the beginning of the interview with Marina Pino she cried: 'I did what I did for my children and out of great financial need (...) When I was asked to do this service, I had just received a electricity bill for one million lire.'³⁷ Later she proudly said about her council house: 'When they gave it to us it was awful, walls, doors, windows, bathroom, kitchen, everything was bad quality, just like in all the council houses in this neighbourhood. We transformed it, because I always dreamt of a beautiful house, like the aristocrats have.'³⁸ Significantly she concluded: 'God, what satisfaction and breath of fresh air, that money in the house'³⁹ Vincenzina's feelings indicated that the illegal money alleviated both frustration and necessity. There is no doubt that in Palermo, as well as in other Italian cities, the concomitance of poverty and the societal exaltation of consumer goods widened the dichotomy between means and goals. Within such an anomie status, it is not surprising that the mafia easily recruited workers, particularly in some areas of the city, such as the ZEN and Brancaccio.

2. Esmeralda Ferrara's experience can be read as a micro-story, reflecting the incongruence of the macro-context. Details of this story are worth describing in this case as

³⁷Pino, *Le signore della droga*, p. 28.

³⁸*ibid.*, p. 32.

³⁹*ibid.*, p. 33.

well. Esmeralda was a young Sicilian woman who wished to become a rock star. For this reason, between the late 1970s and 1980s, she went around performing in different places such as night clubs, public dance-halls, piazzas, etc.⁴⁰ During one of these performances, she met Filippo Ragusa, a Sicilian-American drug trafficker who organised musical events in the US. Esmeralda found him very appealing since he told her stories of glamorous people involved in the music industry. Not surprisingly, she believed her long-awaited chance had finally arrived. Thanks to Ragusa, she produced a record and went on tour. Yet, the music production concealed a substantial narcotics-trafficking operation spanning from Palermo to Milan, and from Milan to New York. Drugs were transported hidden in boxes of vegetables during the first leg and in Esmeralda's records on the last leg. When the smuggling ring was discovered, Esmeralda was arrested and gave birth to Filippo's baby in prison. Eventually she was acquitted since there was insufficient evidence to convict her.

So far we have analysed women involved in carrying drugs; now we turn to stories of drug dealers. Once again the setting is a slum area of Palermo called the ZEN (*Zona di Espansione Nord* – Northern Expansion Zone), built in the 1960s during '*il sacco di Palermo*' and immediately occupied by people who had been made homeless by the 1968 earthquake. Composed of huge, dingy buildings with no services, it was used simply as a dormitory. In the 1980s, the ZEN was expanded; yet the project of renewing the area failed.⁴¹ Female life in the ZEN was tough, as Marina Pino described in relation to the early '80s. There were many cases of girls of 13 or 14 years of age who were compelled to stay at home and help their mothers mind the house, thereby experiencing a form of segregation they managed to interrupt by running away with boys they eventually married and with whom they started having children.⁴² Such situations still exist nowadays in some areas of Palermo, as Padre Antonio Garau told me regarding his parish.⁴³ In the 1980s, 80% of the Palermo drug market took place in the ZEN. Hence, it is not surprising that most of the families living there worked for the '*industria del buco*' ('industry of the fix'). Often the system of drug dealing was organised by mothers who involved their numerous children.⁴⁴ The younger sons were in charge of acting as 'look-outs' and warning if *Beppe* ('police' in the Family code) was arriving; the elder sons linked the drug addicts with the

⁴⁰For the story of Esmeralda Ferrara, Pino, *Le signore della droga*, pp. 71-76.

⁴¹*ibid*, pp. 38-39.

⁴²*ibid*, p. 42.

⁴³Interview with Padre Garau, Palermo, 8 September 2003.

⁴⁴Pino, *Le signore della droga*, pp.36-37.

drug supplier by bringing the drugs to the customers from whom he collected the money; as a supplier, the mother held and prepared the drugs in her home. From the balcony she lowered a basket containing the drugs and then pulled it back up to collect the money.⁴⁵

Renate Siebert observed:

The description of (...) "team work" between mother and children brings recalls early forms of industrial labour, when the emergent factory engaged the entire family group. But in those days the head of the team was the father. In the case of these families, however, the father is often absent. He has either left, or is in prison, or in some cases has been killed.⁴⁶

These 'queens of ZEN', as the press called them, were captured in 1987 after much difficulty since a wide network of neighbours and relatives protected the system of drug dealing.⁴⁷ As with the above couriers, drug dealers living and working in the ZEN spent the money quickly 'for buying the kitchens advertised on television, tiling the bathroom like they had seen in television series, for achieving the appearance of a normal life.'⁴⁸ Therefore, 'they let themselves go and buy the most advertised and most expensive goods, such as American-style kitchens, leather sofas, steam cleaners, hi-fi's, infrared ray ovens. And then they move walls, dismantle pavements, tile the walls, paper the bedrooms, and cram the bathroom with brass and mirrors.'⁴⁹

As suggested earlier, the strain theory enables us to explain this kind of criminal behaviour, such as the cases of those women who, in the 1980s, helped the Serraino-Giovine clan, which controlled the area around Piazza Prealpi, (Northern periphery of Milan). Employed in badly paying jobs, these women decided to spend their free time helping Maria Serraino, Rita Di Giovine's mother and boss of the 'Ndrangheta clan. Their contribution to the criminal organisation consisted of storing drugs and weapons in their houses, and offering their phones, which were free from police taps, and houses to organise meetings.⁵⁰ According to magistrate Maurizio Romanelli, women were inspired to do these jobs due to the good, easy money, which enabled them to buy goods such as motorbikes for their sons.⁵¹

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.49. See the case of Luisa Prestigiacomo, *ibid.*, p. 60.

⁴⁶ Siebert, *Secrets of Life*, p.132.

⁴⁷ Pino, *Le signore della droga*, p. 55.

⁴⁸ Madeo, *Donne di mafia*, p. 197.

⁴⁹ Pino, *Le signore della droga*, p. 50.

⁵⁰ For a synthesis of this case see Ombretta Ingrassi, 'Le donne del clan Serraino-Di Giovine', *Omicron/19*, Ottobre 1999, Anno III, 7.

⁵¹ Interview with Public Prosecutor Maurizio Romanelli, Milan, 9 June 2001.

The above stories bring us to the conclusion that the socio-economic context within which crime is framed becomes of central importance, particularly when analysing the lower levels of the criminal organisation. This level has often been neglected by current historiography that is too concentrated on studying the higher levels of the mafia.

Lastly, let's trace a parallel between the underworld and the legal world. Considering the fact that, as outlined in chapter two, in the 1980s women were likely to be employed at the lower ranks of the labour system, it is not surprising to find women at the bottom of the drug economy.⁵² Therefore, women's participation in the criminal market mirrored somehow the features of female presence in the labour market of the legal world.

5.2.2 *Managers of drug trafficking*

The story of 'Nonna Eroina'

When Angela Russo was arrested in February 1982, along with her sons and daughters-in-law, at the age of 74, she appeared to be just a drug courier exploiting her age and gender.⁵³ Afterwards, it became clear she was one of the leaders of a drug trade that involved members of important mafia families (such as Adelfio, Capizzi, Lombardo and Anselmo) who were later sentenced in the 'maxi-trial'.⁵⁴ People in the *quartiere* called her '*nonna eroina*' ('grandma heroin'), as did the press during the trial. The latter was based on intercepted phone calls and particularly the testimony of the youngest of Angela's son, Savino Coniglio, who denounced his 'colleagues' as well as his mother, sisters, brothers and sisters-in law. This *pentimento* was punished with the murder of his brother Mario (*vendetta trasversale*), who was not involved in the criminal organisation, unlike his wife, son and daughter.⁵⁵ Afraid of being murdered himself, Savino eventually withdrew his confession.

Coming from a mafia family, Angela Russo managed the drug trade by involving members of her family. Although trial evidence showed Angela was not a simple courier, that she instead ran the operation, she denied the accusation: 'So, according to them, I went up and down Italy carrying packages for other people. So, why would I, who in my life have always commanded others, have done this transport service for other people? These are arguments that only these judges that don't know anything about the law and life can

⁵²Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontent*, p. 37.

⁵³Puglisi, *Donne, mafia e antimafia*, p. 74.

⁵⁴Pino, *Le signore della droga*, p. 91.

⁵⁵*ibid.*, p. 98.

sustain.’⁵⁶Angela’s mafia criminal attitude emerged clearly from the above claim of innocence.

In framing the issue of mafia women in their historical perspective, it is interesting to note that Angela was born in 1908 and contrasted her position with the traditional image of women of her generation who are generally depicted as silent and ignorant of their men’s activities. In the interview with Marina Pino, Angela talked about her past: brought up like a man, she learnt from her father how to shoot and also the main mafia principles, which she then taught to her five children. Among her sons, Savino was the most involved in the illegal family business. He was in charge of flying to Milan and Rome from Palermo, where Angela ran the drug operation from her house in the city centre. When police discovered the trade and arrested the entire family, including four women of different generations, Angela played the poor old woman unaware of her son’s activities and claimed ‘Cocaine, what’s that? A detergent?’.⁵⁷As mentioned above, Angela’s role emerged when her son Salvino turned state’s witness, confirming her leadership position, already clear from the taped conversations.⁵⁸In the last chapter, we will return to Angela as an example of a mother who reacted negatively to her son’s decision to collaborate with the state. For mafia association and drug trafficking, Angela was sentenced to five years imprisonment that was commuted to house arrest because of her precarious health and age.⁵⁹The following words show how deeply she believed in the mafia principles, unlike the State:

God damn these cops, goddamn judges. Nowadays, the law does not exist anymore; they invent the law; they do what they want. These cops that get mixed up in everything; they don’t know the truth; if they didn’t have informers they would not be able to do anything; they only investigate if they get a “tip” and that becomes immediately Gospel, without asking who is talking, what’s he saying and why is he saying it. And the same for the judges; judges disgust me.⁶⁰

By idealizing the mafia of the past, Angela showed the same attitude usually adopted by old mafia bosses when nostalgic for the ‘good old mafia’.

...once upon a time in Palermo there was the law. And this law did not kill a mother’s innocent sons. The mafia did not kill anyone if they were not sure of the

⁵⁶*ibid*, p. 79. Puglisi, *Donne, mafia e antimafia*.

⁵⁷*ibid*, p.138.

⁵⁸For Angela Russo’s story see Siebert, *Le donne, la mafia*, pp. 222-227 and Pino, *Le signore della droga*, cap.VI-VII.

⁵⁹Principato, Dino, *Mafia donna*, p. 65.

⁶⁰Pino, *Le signore della droga*, p. 78.

fact, really sure that it was the right thing to do, really sure of the right law. Of course whoever committed a sin *avia a chianciri* (started to cry), whoever is wrong has to pay, but at that time there was the rule of a warning. The person was warned at least three times: "Be careful, because *sgarrasti* (you slipped up)", then if the person kept being wrong and not right, of course he had to disappear and in fact they made him disappear (...) At that time there was such a law and such a mafia. There were real men. My father, Don Peppino, was a real man and everybody trembled with fear in his presence, from Torrelunga and Brancaccio all the way to Bagheria.⁶¹

La signora

Moving from Palermo to Milan and from the Cosa Nostra to the 'Ndrangheta, we turn our attention to the case of another woman running a drug trade. Mentioned in the previous section, this is the story of Maria Serraino who belonged to a long-standing mafia family from the Reggio Calabria area.⁶² In the 1960s, she emigrated with her husband, sons and daughters to Milan where she began her illegal career of smuggling cigarettes and receiving stolen goods.⁶³ During the 1970s, her trade shifted from cigarettes to drugs and weapons and involved the whole family. Her older sons, Antonio and Emilio, who dealt in stolen cars, helped to develop the drug trade from their contacts with foreign criminals thereby transforming their small business into a huge international trade. The family trafficked not only drugs (including hashish, cocaine, heroin and ecstasy), but also arms, which were sent to Calabria where their relatives were involved in a feud that lasted from 1986 to 1991. From the testimonies of various *pentiti*, including her daughter Rita, the fact emerges that Maria, along with her son Emilio, was the leader of the clan that exercised military control over the area around Piazza Prealpi. According to her son-in law, Zolla, the square was Maria's *feudo* (fiefdom) and her home in Via Belgioioso was the headquarters of the illegal operations. The other central operation was located in Spain and managed by Emilio Di Giovine.⁶⁴ He organised narcotics operations from Morocco to England and across the Atlantic from Colombia to Milan; therefore, police worldwide wanted him. Among the many intercepted telephone calls from which Maria's leading role emerged, an illuminating one was when she stated her power in relation to her son Emilio:

⁶¹*ibid.*, p. 80.

⁶² For Serraino-Di Giovine clan see Ingrascì Ombretta, 'Le donne nella 'Ndrangheta: il caso Serraino-Di Giovine', in AA.VV., *donne e mafie*.

⁶³ For the criminal context in Milan and for a description of the relationship between Serraino-Di Giovine clan and other mafia clans, Portanova, Rossi, Stefanoni, *Mafia a Milano*.

⁶⁴ Tribunale di Milano, Sentenza n. 16/94.

I don't know what my son is fucking doing.... because he told me that you have... you have to organise everything. Now, you are doing it...but don't fuck with me, if I cancel out Emilio, for me he is done for, because I am already pissed off... with my own fucking problemsyou are taking care of your fucking business... I am the one, me, who has to come when you unload... I am the one who has to come watch my own fucking business.⁶⁵

Three police operations, called *Belgio* from the name of Maria's street, coordinated by Maurizio Romanelli, Public Prosecutor of the Milan *Direzione distrettuale antimafia* (a special sector of the Criminal Court dealing exclusively with mafia-related crimes), led to the arrest of almost all members of the clan. The investigations relied on: wiretapped conversations; flagrant arrests; seizures of drugs, money and documents; testimonies from *pentiti*; international requests; and autonomous investigations by criminal offices from other regions.⁶⁶ Maria, charged with mafia association and murder, was sentenced with *ergastolo* (life imprisonment).⁶⁷ This study will return to Maria's story when treating Rita Di Giovine's experience in chapter seven.

Let us now draw some conclusions by comparing Maria and Angela's stories. Albeit their differences in terms of geographical and criminal operations, they show a few similarities in relation to acquiring and performing their leading role. Both women came from mafia families, which meant a 'respectable' surname giving them a 'mafia licence'. Nonetheless, they had to share their leadership with men, i.e. their sons (Angela with Savino, Maria with Emilio). No matter if these women had a strong character and were able to exercise a real power, they needed their sons in order to maintain relationships within the criminal sphere. The testimony of Vittorio Foschini is interesting in this sense. As boss of the neighbouring clan, he had to deal with Maria's clan. In the account he gave me, he stressed, not only in words but also with visual expressions, his irritation in dealing with Maria about mafia business because of her sex.⁶⁸ There is no doubt that to be respected in the criminal field one needed to be male. This would suggest that women in positions of leadership must always be supported by a man. As this thesis argues, women cannot employ an authoritative role unless this is supported or delegated by a male boss. I shall return to this point in due course.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ *ibid.*; Ciconte, *Processo alla 'Ndrangheta*, p. 193.

⁶⁷ Tribunale di Milano, Sentenza n. 16/94.

⁶⁸ Interview with Vittorio Foschini, Modena, 4 May 2004.

5. 3. *Financial activities: from figureheads to money launderers*

By expanding the illegal trade in geographical and quantitative terms, mafia organisations, including the Cosa Nostra and 'Ndrangheta, accumulated so much wealth they needed to launder illegal money. This was often achieved by investing money in legitimate companies registered under dummy names. These companies often belonged to women since, as we know, they were unlikely to be investigated.⁶⁹ 'A great number of women merely abide the illicit activities of their relatives: becoming figureheads, shareholders or registered holders of companies and factories used for laundering dirty money; owners of real estate bought with illegal profits; or owners of commercial businesses on behalf of mafiosi who cannot appear.'⁷⁰ According to Public Prosecutor Laura Vaccaro, nowadays finance is women's dominant field of involvement.⁷¹ In line with Vaccaro, Teresa Principato's study on women and the mafia, albeit quite superficial in understanding mafia women subjectively, was particularly useful in its analysis of the criminal aspects of women charged with mafia-related crimes. She explained that: 'nowadays women perform an indispensable activity within the mafia, particularly in financial-economic management by running ghost enterprises that launder dirty money.'⁷²

Such reality started to emerge following the enactment of the Rognoni-La Torre Law in 1982. By defining the charge of 'mafia association', the Rognoni-La Torre law marked a turning point in mafia investigation since it enabled magistrates to prosecute mafia members not just for committing single crimes but also for being part of an association with criminal purposes. Moreover, the 1982 law gave investigators a useful instrument with which to investigate mafia methods of investing illegal money. In other words, investigators could sequester those properties registered under clean names yet suspected to belong to a mafioso. As mentioned above, in many cases the names used for illegal financial operations belonged to women who most of the time were aware of this procedure. As Principato pointed out: 'It is impossible they do not know the provenance of

⁶⁹ Siebert, *Secrets of Life*, p. 115.

⁷⁰ Puglisi, *Donne, mafia e antimafia*, p. 77.

⁷¹ Interview with Public Prosecutor Laura Vaccaro, Palermo, 5 September 2003.

⁷² Teresa Principato's paper given at the Conference 'La donna nell'universo mafioso', Palermo 8 - 9 Febbraio 1997, published in *Segno*, anno XXIII, 183, 1997.

the money or what such companies are for.’⁷³In the next chapter we will discuss the Rognoni-La Torre law as one of the factors contributing to the deconstruction of the stereotype of women as external to mafia activities.

Just through a quick scrutiny of newspapers, it is common to find many examples of women’s names in companies covering mafia activities. Let’s take the company ‘Racoin S.p.a.’, which was registered under the names of Emanuela Gelardi, wife of the boss of the San Lorenzo cosca, and Maria Concetta Caruso, mother of a member of the Cupola, Giacomo Giuseppe Gambino. Another well-known company, ‘Agrisicula S.p.a.’, which laundered mafia money, was registered under the name of the sister-in-law of mafia boss Pietro Vernengo. Another case was that of Ri.Sa. (the initials of Salvatore Riina), which was registered in Franca Migliore’s name, wife of mafia member Gaetano Fiore.⁷⁴ One notable case, in which a woman was conscious of her involvement, was that of Rosa Bontade, Giacomo Vitale’s widow and Stefano Bontade’s sister. Her profile was typical of a white-collar criminal, given the fact that various banks considered her a ‘business lady’ and loaned her money to invest in her company, Atlantide, a building enterprise involved in laundering mafia money.⁷⁵The ISEP Company was a private institution, apparently giving grants and loans; in reality, it lent money on usurious terms. A report from the Corleone police states: ‘In ISEP, Luciano Liggio was the leader of a substantial squad of trusted killers, with the task of punishing eventual late or insolvent debtors. ISEP shareholders included not only criminals, such as drug trafficker Antonino Sorci, but also people above any suspicion such as Epifania Silvia Scardino, Vito Ciancimino’s wife.’⁷⁶

The criminal investigation called *Gemini*, from the initials of Gela and Milan, discovered a mafia clan of the *Stidda*, a group detached from the Cosa Nostra, which continuously transferred people from Gela, a mafia town in the heart of Sicily, to the periphery of Milan between San Donato and San Giuliano. The media called this criminal organisation the ‘*mafia rosa*’ (pink mafia) due to the involvement of women. Among these was Cecilia Vitale, who had a role in the real estate business managed by her boyfriend, Giuseppe Di Stefano. In 1993, the couple moved from Gela to San Giuliano, as a consequence of the expansion of mafia business into Northern Italy carried out by the leading *Stidda* family, Emmanuello. Magistrate Marco Alma, Public Prosecutor of the

⁷³Teresa Principato interviewed by Marina Terragni, *Il Venerdì della Repubblica*, Luglio 1997.

⁷⁴Sandra Rizza, ‘Se parlassero, la mafia sarebbe sconfitta’, *l’Espresso*, 14 luglio 1995.

⁷⁵Giuseppe Lo Bianco, ‘Tutte casa e Famiglia’, *L’Espresso*, 14 luglio 1995.

⁷⁶Ernesto Oliva, Salvo Palazzolo, *L’altra mafia*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2001, p.70.

case, told me Cecilia was only 17 years old when Giuseppe registered in her name various flats used by members of the organisation for their illegal activities.⁷⁷ Cecilia's sister-in-law, Maria Luisa Serafino (wife of Roberto Di Stefano, Giuseppe's brother), along with her sister Francesca, was in charge of accounting for the income of the criminal organisation and sometimes also investing it.⁷⁸

Even in the Serraino-Di Giovine clan, the investment of money was entrusted prevalently to women, in particular Livia De Martino and Marisa Di Giovine. The latter was the daughter of Emilio Di Giovine and Patricia Reilly, who moved with Marisa to England in order to offer her daughter a childhood and adolescence far from the mafia context. Yet, as soon as she was 18 years old, Marisa moved back to Italy where, within her father's criminal organisation, she became financial mediator by laundering the proceeds from drug and weapons trafficking. Marisa's financial role was confirmed not only by her bank documents but also by testimonies of various *pentiti*, in particular Jaime Gonzales Garcia who 'confirmed the role of the investigated woman and explained that enormous amounts, constituting profits from the huge hashish traffic, were consigned by Marisa (Emilio's daughter) and Bruno's wife. He also specified he deposited the money in an account in a Geneva bank where Maria also had an account with large transactions.'⁷⁹ Since judges took into consideration her young age and psychological dependence on her father, Marisa was charged only with mafia association and sentenced to six years imprisonment. Livia De Martino, married to Antonio Di Giovine, Rita Di Giovine's brother, was involved in the activities of the Serraino-Di Giovine family and managed the bar where 'Ndrangheta members used to meet and organise their major operations. Pertinent to this section, she played a financial role by being the beneficiary of cheques from Italian-American drug deals as the holder of an account in Switzerland and finally becoming owner of a large real-estate portfolio, valued at nearly fifty million euros, which included commercial centres, houses and shops.⁸⁰

A case offering interesting insight into female financial involvement is that of Maria Concetta Imbraguglia, wife of Antonio Mandalari, the accountant for Cosa Nostra bosses

⁷⁷Interview with Public Prosecutor Marco Alma, Milan, 17 September 2002.

⁷⁸For a detailed description of the criminal investigation *Gemini* see Ombretta Ingrassi, 'Operazione Gemini e i collaboratori di giustizia', *Omicron* /38, Novembre 2002, Anno VI, 3.

⁷⁹Richiesta di rinvio a giudizio, Direzione distrettuale antimafia di Milano (Proc. 3760/93).

⁸⁰*ibid.*

between the 1970s and early 1990s.⁸¹ Along with her husband, Maria Concetta was charged with mafia association but later acquitted. In the next chapter, we will broach her case from a judicial point of view. With a degree in accounting, Maria Concetta started in 1971 to collaborate with her husband in his office, frequented by mafia protagonists in the drug trade of the 1970s and '80s. These included Badalamenti, Liggio, Madonia, and Vernengo who received financial advice from the Mandalaris. Not surprisingly, 'A number of properties registered to Mandalari's companies were at the disposal of the Cosa Nostra, principally for the use of mafiosi in hiding.'⁸² In addition, Antonio Mandalari created front companies on behalf of mafiosi who thereby could participate in public bids, which eventually were achieved through Mandalari's political links (thanks to his membership in the Freemasons). In 1974, Mandalari was sent to *soggiorno obbligato* for a while because his activities were under suspicion. Afraid of further investigations, he registered front businesses in his female relatives' names, including his mother-in-law who most probably was unaware of the use of her name. This was not the case with his wife who was her husband's *factotum*, as various *pentiti*, previously clients of Mandalari's office, told Public Prosecutors. Moreover, she held important posts in numerous companies linked to the mafia.⁸³ Maurizio Delucia, the Public Prosecutor who dealt with Mandalari's judicial case, told Clare Longrigg that Maria Concetta

was always there in the office while clients came and went. (...) She is on the board of a number of companies. If you are on the board you have to know what's going on. It is possible for someone to be on the board in name only but very unlikely in this case. We put taps on the phones and found out that she knows her husband's mafia clients and his politician friends personally; when they rang up and he wasn't there, she was always in a position to give them an answer or make a decision. Her role in the firm is the same as his: she knows that you have to show accounts in a certain way to make it look as though the money has followed certain channels.⁸⁴

Maria Concetta is an example of woman who is not simply a '*prestanome*' (literally 'name lender', someone who acts as a front on company documents). Her case tells us that female financial involvement becomes more sophisticated when women are well prepared. Later on, we will encounter similar kinds of cases that occurred in the 1990s. Maria Concetta seemed to be an exception for her time (1970s). However, her case shows us that the mafia system soon took advantage of women's progress in education.

⁸¹For Maria Concetta Imbraguglia's case see Principato, Dino, *Mafia donna*, pp. 51-53.

⁸²Longrigg, *Mafia Women*, p. 148.

⁸³Principato, Dino, *Mafia donna*, p. 52.

⁸⁴Longrigg, *Mafia Women*, pp. 152-153.

Let's now focus on Bernardo Provenzano's use of women in the financial field. Why did Bernardo Provenzano's nickname shift from '*il trattore*' ('the tractor') to '*il ragioniere*' ('the accountant')?'⁸⁵ According to Calderone: 'My brother nicknamed him "*u trature*" in reference to his killing ability and particularly to the viale Lazio massacre. In other words, where he walked the grass did not grow any more.'⁸⁶ Conversely, in 1994 Gioacchino Pennino revealed that Provenzano was the *ragioniere*, or better 'the brain of Palermo politics'.⁸⁷ This shift in nicknaming the head of the Cosa Nostra stemmed from the fact that although Provenzano took part in Riina's attack against the state in the early 1990s, at the same time he drew a parallel strategy. By developing crucial links with the legitimate world, Provenzano concentrated not only on the traditional construction business but also on new ones, including the health and waste industries. When Leoluca Bagarella, Totò Riina's substitute, was arrested in 1995, Provenzano became the boss of bosses and, as such, opted to give the Cosa Nostra a new direction. His plan was successful in making the boundaries between their legal and illegal activities more and more indistinct.

As Salvo Palazzolo and Ernesto Oliva explained, the business of Binu Provenzano revolved around health-care investments. Giuseppe Lipari was Provenzano's lieutenant who contributed mostly to building the 'USL business' (USL is the Italian public health office), being a 'great director of health businesses'; officially he was a surveyor for ANAS (the Italian motorway company); in reality he was an entrepreneur and financial consultant to the head of Cosa Nostra. He constructed medical supply businesses such as 'Scientisud', whose shareholders were also his wife, Marianna Impastato, and sister-in-law, Concetta Arguso.⁸⁸ Salvo Palazzolo discovered a crucial report (the Corleone Carabinieri's report against Gariffo *et al.*), which enabled him to understand Provenzano's business; the report, from 1984, indicated many details and names in the new mafia business carried out by Provenzano's group. The importance of this report was underestimated by experts and investigators, neglected even though it warned: 'We are facing a monopolistic situation (...) created by companies seeking to grab bigger and bigger slices of a profitable market given the high cost of scientific hospital

⁸⁵ See testimony of mafioso Gioacchino Pennino, in Oliva, Palazzolo, *L'altra mafia*, p. 29.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p. 30.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p. 30.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p. 89.

equipment.’⁸⁹ Significant to this thesis, the report also alluded to the role of women in the financial management of the business. Therefore, we can maintain that the *altra mafia*, as Palazzolo called Provenzano’s organisation, was pioneering not only because it undertook new types of business, but also because it utilised women during unsuspecting times. Suffice it to say that Provenzano, despite being on the run for 40 years, was able to keep his fortune thanks to his partner Saveria Palazzolo whose story will be told later on in this study. Even Cinzia Lipari, Giuseppe Lipari’s daughter, played a central role within the ranks of Provenzano’s organisation. Information on her case came from trial documents of the initial phase of the criminal processing system, and from Public Prosecutor Michele Prestipino, who carried out her examinations, and whom I interviewed in September 2003.⁹⁰ Cinzia’s fundamental function linking her father with Provenzano will be discussed in detail in the next section. Here it is interesting to outline her financial role as an example both of the female role in this field, and the strategy carried out by the ‘*altra mafia*’. The Carabinieri report mentioned above stated that: ‘The person under investigation (Cinzia Lipari), as far back as 1984, managed numerous companies of the Provenzano group and, hence, was one of the main interlocutors in phone calls from and for the related businesses of the mafia association (Residence Capo San Vito, IMA, Arezzo Costruzioni, Costa Rossa s.p.a. Campeggio Z10).’⁹¹ In the documents regarding her accusation with mafia association, her financial role was depicted as follows: ‘Lawyer Cinzia Lipari, in close collaboration with her father, was in charge of collecting, keeping and distributing profits from the management of goods and activities traceable to the fugitive Provenzano and the Corleonesi. She often managed these goods on behalf of her father.’⁹² Moreover, trial documents reported she had close relationships with Provenzano figureheads, including Schimmeni and Mirabile.⁹³

There is no doubt that the growth of mafia wealth, and the corresponding necessity of investing money from illegal operations, opened up job opportunities for women beyond their traditional roles. However, this implied no improvements in women’s condition,

⁸⁹Legione dei carabinieri di Palermo, Gruppo di Palermo –Nucleo operativo – prima sezione, Rapporto giudiziario n. 3033/16-1983 del 10/04/1984 a carico di Gariffo Carmelo + 29, pp.46 e ss. Quoted in Oliva, Palazzolo, *L’altra mafia*, p. 89.

⁹⁰Interview with Public Prosecutor Michele Prestipino, Palermo, 10 September 2003.

⁹¹Richiesta delle misure di custodia cautelare in carcere, Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia di Palermo (Proc. Nr. 3157/98).

⁹²*ibid.*

⁹³*ibid.*

because they remained dependent on their men. As Renate Siebert observed: 'The business of being a front woman can also be regarded as work outside the family, because it implies an individual legal responsibility in the public sphere. Yet, the family connection, and subordination to whoever in reality is the active subject being lent the woman's name, seem to be the principal feature of this function.'⁹⁴

To illustrate the concomitant presence of new female roles and the enduring male dominance and bonding, consider the story of Nunzia Graviano who held an important position within the criminal organisation. Since Nunzia spoke English, was computer literate and could travel abroad easily, her brothers, Giuseppe and Filippo (the famous Brancaccio bosses sentenced for the murder of Padre Pino Puglisi), used Nunzia to invest the illegal money from their *mandamento* in international circles.⁹⁵ To carry out her 'financial duty', she moved to Montecarlo where she entered into a relationship with a Syrian man. A letter from prison showed her brothers questioned Nina's love story: 'What kind of religion does he believe in? There are some traditions that you know very well...I am Sicilian, you are Sicilian.' Eventually, she split up with the Syrian.⁹⁶ This underlines the fact that even an apparently self-confident woman such as Nunzia, who met people at an international level, had to give up her individuality in order to comply it with the male rules of her family.⁹⁷ The contradictions emerging from Nunzia's experience give an interesting contribution to the discussion regarding the persistence of the patriarchal system in contemporary society.

As pointed out above, the mafia used a new generation of women for skilled labour, such as Nunzia Graviano and Cinzia Lipari, more educated than their mothers. In the past, the kinds of illicit jobs offered by the underworld were suitable more for men than women. In other words, 'the tertiarization' of the mafia, as much as that in the legitimate world, created new opportunities for women. At the same time, the breaking down of gendered barriers, which occurred partially even in the mafia, eliminated ideological obstacles to the access of women to criminal activities.

⁹⁴Siebert, *Secrets of Life*, p. 116.

⁹⁵Tribunale di Palermo, Ufficio del giudice per l'udienza preliminare, dr. Fabio Licata, Sentenza del 27/11/2000.

⁹⁶'Le signore del crimine nuovi boss della mafia', *la Repubblica*, 28 Maggio 2002. Interview with Public Prosecutor Michele Prestipino, Palermo, 10 September 2003.

⁹⁷For the description of Nunzia's personality, interview with Prosecutor Michele Prestipino, Palermo, 10 September 2003.

5. 4. *Mafia women: from linking mafia bosses to running mafia clans*

Women involved in the hard core of the mafia, either as couriers between mafia bosses or managers of mafia clans were relatives (e.g. wives, daughters and sisters) of mafia bosses. This kind of female involvement became more frequent during critical times caused by feuds between clans or state criminal investigations.

As already analysed in chapter two, since the mid-1980s, the Italian government improved its battle against the mafia thanks to the criminal investigation by the Palermo Court, which culminated in the so-called 'maxi-trial' of 1986. Moreover, in the early 1990s, after the confirmation of the maxi-trial convictions and the end of political protection, following the criminal investigations known as *Mani Pulite* (Clean Hands operation)⁹⁸ the mafia opted to show its strength by intensifying the strategy of terror against public officials. The 1992 assassinations of magistrates Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, who had fought strenuously against the mafia, led to the implementation of antimafia laws and an increase in the phenomenon of *pentitismo* (turning state's witness). As a consequence of growing concern by the State and the crisis in the mafia due to the increase in defections, the growing number of bosses either imprisoned or on the run created a need for workers, particularly at the top of the organisations. As a consequence, power was temporarily entrusted to women. Therefore, female involvement in the mafia became crucial to the survival of mafia operations.

In Calabria, frequent inter-clan warfare forced men to hide from their rivals; therefore they had to leave women in control of their territory. While hiding in the hills around Palmi because of the danger after the murder of his brother, Francesco Condello was in the hands of his wife, Concetta Managò, who 'hid weapons for him and transferred them from one place to another, acted as chauffeur, and helped organise meetings with other members of the clan.'⁹⁹ Even Rita Di Giovine told me it was quite common for women in Calabria to substitute for men on the run: 'the men stayed indoors and women were the ones who worked, in other words anything that happened was always through us women.'¹⁰⁰ Trial documents regarding Giuseppa Condello, wife of 'Ndrangheta boss Antonio Imerti, confirmed Rita's words. Giuseppina, in fact, 'acted as his spy, representative, ambassador;

⁹⁸For a synthesis of the so-called 'fall of the First Republic' see Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents*, pp. 179-194.

⁹⁹Siebert, *Secrets of Life*, p. 257.

¹⁰⁰Interview with Santa Margherita Di Giovine, Milan, 24 April 1998.

they spoke at least once a day, and she informed him of every movement occurring inside his territory.’¹⁰¹Giuseppa, along with her sister, Caterina Condello, ran all mafia activities.

Giuseppa Condello does not limit her own role to that of enforced and unwilling participant in Imerti’s illegal activities; she is actively involved, and her function is by no means a superficial one; in all the criminal operations of the organisation, and specifically: A) in her contacts and connections with her own family...B) in preparing and carrying out acts of extortion...Caterina Condello otherwise ‘Junior’. Her role was fundamental within the organisation. There is practically no sphere of the group’s activity which does not involve the energetic operational skills of ‘Junior’...1. Basic logistic support...2. Co-extortionist...3. Front woman for Imerti.¹⁰²

Police discovered Condello’s activity by intercepting phone calls between Giuseppa and her husband. Finally, she was tried and sentenced to 14 years in prison for mafia association and extortion of money from legitimate business on a regular basis.¹⁰³Racketeering was one of the main criminal activities run by Giuseppa and her sister: ‘When a new commercial business opened, they contacted the owner and dictated the terms of payment, then they made their monthly rounds to pick up the money.

As Imerti himself recognized, women made out frequently better than men in this job, since they could threaten without the use of arms.’¹⁰⁴The point underlined by Imerti is illuminating in understanding the nature of female power in a violent environment such as the mafia where physical strength is one of its fundamental features. Women could run extortion rackets because they did not involve the immediate use of violence, but only the threat of it. In other words, women could intimidate people by threatening male violence if they did not receive the protection money.¹⁰⁵An example of this is an episode told to me by the owner of a fashion shop in the centre of Palermo.¹⁰⁶Every month she received a visit from two mafia women, mother and daughter, dressed in the best Italian designer clothes. During their visits, they took all the dresses they wanted without paying but above all asked for the mafia tax. Female engagement in racketeering demonstrated that active female participation in the mafia was very ambiguous. Women who dealt with extortion

¹⁰¹Siebert, *Secrets of Life*, p. 88.

¹⁰²Siebert, *Secrets of Life*, p. 115.

¹⁰³*ibid.*, p. 89.

¹⁰⁴*ibid.*, p. 88.

¹⁰⁵The last case concerning women managing a wide business based on racketeering occurred in July 2004., Richiesta per l’applicazione di misure cautelari e contestuale richiesta di Sequestro preventivo, Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia di Palermo (Proc. n. 13894/01).

¹⁰⁶Interview with the owner of the shop who does not want to reveal her name, Palermo, 10 July 2001.

were not exploited, as was the case seen above with women at the bottom of the organisation. On the contrary, they wanted somehow to show their power, though it stemmed from being the relatives of mafia bosses. This brings us to the conclusion that female power in the public sphere depended on male power. This consideration becomes particularly true with regard to women reaching a leadership level, because their position was substitutive.

To investigate the nature of female power at the top of mafia clans, we should analyse the shift between acting as couriers when their men were on the run or in prison to running mafia groups. From Giuseppa Condello's story, it seems the progress can be traced along a continuous line. In the past, investigators tended to exclude the prospect that even relatives of bosses on the run might be in touch with fugitives, because of the widespread belief, on both the popular as well as the judicial level, that women were unaware of their men folk's activities. Only recently has the possibility started to be considered that women see their men while they are on the run. In this sense, Salvatore Boemi, Prosecutor of the *Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia* of Reggio Calabria, claimed: 'women are the umbilical cord of any fugitive... if the women of fugitives in Calabria were followed more, we would have fewer fugitives...'¹⁰⁷

Cinzia Lipari had a sophisticated way of acting as a courier, enabling her father to communicate with the mafia organisation from prison. Angelo Siino, an important *pentito*, called by investigators the '*ministro dei lavori pubblici*' ('minister of public works') of the Cosa Nostra, during an examination on 22nd April 1998 said, 'I kept in touch with Lipari through his daughter, Cinzia, the lawyer.' Trial documents described her function as an essential link between her imprisoned father and the mafia association. In chapter four, we quoted an intercepted prison conversation between Cinzia's father, Giuseppe Lipari, his wife and his son, where he complained that Cinzia could not visit him because of her difficult pregnancy. Giuseppe's discontent was due to the fact that Cinzia was his means of delivering '*pizzini*' (notes) to Cosa Nostra boss Bernardo Provenzano. Not only Cinzia, but all family members helped Giuseppe maintain his relations with the Cosa Nostra. Trial sources documented this function for Giuseppe Lipari's wife, Marianna Impastato: 'She was the link between her husband, Giuseppe Lipari (as the principal subject administering Corleonesi assets), fugitive from justice Bernardo Provenzano, and other affiliates and

¹⁰⁷Siebert, *Secrets of Life*, p. 257.

members of the organisation at large. Thereby, she permitted the communication and exchange of news concerning the management of the illegal activities of the mafia group.'¹⁰⁸ However, unlike her brother and mother, Cinzia's role as a link was special since she was not only Giuseppe's daughter but also and above all his lawyer. 'The woman, in fact, as opposed to her brother, more adapted to unskilled labour, exploiting her background of legal knowledge and experience gained during her career as a lawyer, ended up making an incomparable contribution to her father's illegal activities.'¹⁰⁹ Being his lawyer, she had a preferential access to her father-client who could safely pass her his notes. Therefore Cinzia: 'by taking advantage of her professional mandate and the relative secrecy given to defence lawyer activities, often hid whatever her father asked her in the legal folder she brought during the prison meetings, thus bypassing prison controls.'¹¹⁰ From the transcripts of the electronic surveillance tapes recorded in prison, there were many episodes in which 'Cinzia Lipari showed her role as letter carrier for correspondence between Giuseppe Lipari and Bernardo Provenzano. In fact, this woman, via the now tested folder for trial documents, managed to carry the missives written in prison by her father for the fugitive and, on the other hand, bring back the replies from Provenzano.'¹¹¹ Therefore, 'defence attorney meetings were obviously the moment when Giuseppe Lipari exercised his activities as administrator for the Cosa Nostra thanks to the compliance of his daughter.'¹¹² Thus, Lipari used his daughter not only to communicate with the exterior but also, as analysed in the previous section, to manage his business and give orders to mafia members.

From Cinzia's example it should be clear what is meant in this thesis by drawing a continuous line to describe the inside female role from courier to leader. It should also show the extent the female function was fundamental in order to maintain male power during difficult times. Though Cinzia also played an active criminal role even when her father was free, it became more crucial when he was in prison. As outlined in the previous section, documents emphasised that Cinzia had always worked for the organisation: 'The role of Ms. Lipari was not strictly connected to the emergency period caused by the imprisonment of her father who could not therefore operate personally. In fact, the woman

¹⁰⁸Richiesta per l'applicazione delle misure cautelari, Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia di Palermo (Proc. n. 3157/98).

¹⁰⁹*ibid.*

¹¹⁰*ibid.*

¹¹¹*ibid.*

¹¹²*ibid.*

had already done everything possible and taken advantage of the administration of *Corleonesi* assets since as far back as 1984 (...).'¹¹³ Many points in the trial documents stressed she was involved in the organisation not just during periods of emergency.¹¹⁴ However, during difficult times, namely when her father was in prison, her roles and tasks extended. What is more, Cinzia demonstrated her leading role by contradicting her father thus showing that she was totally aware of her function and position. In relation to the meeting with Di Miceli, for instance, she 'was not a mere intermediary who took care of the organisation of meetings maybe without knowing what they were for. On the contrary, she was very aware of the fact that during those summits with Di Miceli, the latter collected (...), amount of money belonging to the *Corleonesi*.'¹¹⁵ Moreover 'From a conversation on 20 August 1990, it was clear that Cinzia herself ordered, even contrary to her father's will, that nothing was to be given to Di Miceli, who had already received 40 million lire on 17 July 1999.'¹¹⁶

There is no doubt that women's main role, when their man (father, brother or husband) was in prison, was to act as a link between him and the mafia organisation. This was confirmed by the case in Palermo of Gisella Greco, arrested in December 2002 and charged with mafia association. Gisella Greco's role was discovered in the criminal operation code-named *Ghiaccio*, which trapped Gisella's husband, Giuseppe Guttadauro. Brancaccio's *capo mandamento*, he was in prison between December 1999 and December 2000 following his arrest in the famous police operation code-named *Golden Market*.¹¹⁷ According to Public Prosecutor Gaetano Paci, 'Gisella Greco enabled her husband to keep his leadership position, although he was in prison (...).'¹¹⁸ Guttadauro used his wife and son Francesco in order to: 'maintain his relationships with mafiosi on the outside and reinforce his definitive investiture as head of the Brancaccio *mandamento* – but also an absolute convergence in relation to the latest and current reorganisation of this *mandamento* and the families that composed it.'¹¹⁹

¹¹³*ibid.*

¹¹⁴*ibid*

¹¹⁵*ibid.*

¹¹⁶annotazione della Squadra Mobile della Questura di Palermo in data 8 febbraio 2001, all. 176, in *ibid*

¹¹⁷Richiesta per l'applicazione di misure cautelari, Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia di Palermo (Proc. n. 16676/01).

¹¹⁸*Giornale di Sicilia*, 7 Dicembre 2002.

¹¹⁹ Richiesta per l'applicazione di misure cautelari, Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia di Palermo (Proc. n. 16676/01).

The passage from being a 'simple' courier to assuming a leadership position depended both on external circumstances and personal character. The case of Giuseppina Vitale was illuminating in this sense. Giuseppina was the sister of the Vitale brothers, Leonardo and Vito, bosses of the Partinico *mandamento* belonging to the Corleonese faction. In the beginning, Giusy was the link between Leonardo, who was in prison, and Vito, who was on the run. Her various tasks ranged from giving orders to members of the clan to bringing lovers to Vito at his hiding place. When Vito was arrested, Giusy's role became more vital as she was the only family member, apart from her nephew Giovanni (Vito's son), able to run the family business. She demonstrated a certain degree of autonomy, as when, contrary to her brothers' wishes, she planned to murder a man who informed the police of Vito's location. The following quote from the court sentence explained Giusy's 'progress' within the organisation:

The direct examination of these conversations shows, in fact, how the activity and contributions given to the criminal activities coordinated by her brothers developed from an initial activity of sending and exchanging important messages (in relation to which the woman seemed well aware of the role played by her relatives within the mafia context as well as the meaning those messages had to that organisation) to a subsequent moment when, also due to the arrest of her brother Vito, (...) she took personal initiative in relation to the decision and organization of serious violent events, which failed only due to external circumstances beyond the defendants' control.¹²⁰

Giusy's shift towards an independent decisional role within the organisation while her brothers were in prison came as a form of relief to her after years of taking orders from them.¹²¹ There is no doubt that she was quite oppressed by her brother's orders, as this emerged from some of the intercepted conversations in prison, in particular when Leonardo, after giving her each order, said to her as a sort of stock phrase: *U capisti?* ('Got it?'). And she would answer him: '*See*' ('Yes').

Men 'promoted' women only in emergency situations because they knew that the concession of power was temporary, namely until they were out of prison. This was clear from Cinzia Lipari's story seen above; she had played a supportive role since her youth, yet when her father was captured her position progressed in terms of importance, and then, as soon as Cinzia's father was released, she returned to a secondary position. Men found it convenient to turn over their power to women because women did as much as they could to

¹²⁰Tribunale di Palermo, Sez. II Penale, Sentenza Campione Ciriello + altri n. 2370/2001.

¹²¹Interview with Public Prosecutor Anna Maria Picozzi, Palermo, 5 July 2001.

preserve men's power. Marisa Di Giovine's effort was demonstrative; while her father was in prison she prevented other men from the clan from taking over her father's power. During that time, not only did she deliver messages from Emilio Di Giovine to the other members of the organisation but above all defended Emilio's authority against internal attacks, including those from Emilio's brother, Antonio.

The fact that power reverted back to men once they were free brings us to the conclusion that men entrusted their power to their women not only because they were part of the family, and as such trustworthy, but also because entrusting authority to another man would entail the risk of losing it entirely. As women were excluded from mafia power by definition, giving it to them was meant to ensure that the leadership would always revert back. These gender dynamics were another proof of female subordination in the mafia even at the top of the organisation. As we will explain better, women achieved leading positions not as a result of gender equality, but only through male necessity. Emphasising this exploitation does not mean overlooking the conscious female involvement. Actually, in relation to entrusting power to women, it must be considered as well that women showed immediate capabilities in running illegal activities during male absence. In other words, women had sufficient know-how to carry out the job as soon as it was required. This tells us that they had been included in the power syndicate certainly before their appearance on the criminal scene. Gisella Greco's case is illustrative in this sense, as the prosecutor wrote: 'As already demonstrated in relation to the previous conversation, Greco showed an immediate understanding of the received instructions and was perfectly aware both of the nature of interests at work and the roles played by all the involved subjects.'¹²² Taped prison conversations revealed Giusy Vitale knew all the dynamics in the Cosa Nostra organisation, so much so she even gave her opinion about the substitution of a *capo mandamento*. The man indicated by Giusy as the new head of the *mandamento*, Marco Fava, was arrested; the new name was indicated by her brother Leonardo in a note given to Giusy. By participating at the decision-making level, Giusy became part of the power syndicate.

At this point, I would suggest that on a general level the reasons why women were not considered suitable for a leadership position in the mafia system were similar to those still

¹²²Richiesta per l'applicazione di misure cautelari, Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia di Palermo (Proc. n. 16676/01)

prevailing in the legitimate world. That is why some observations on attitudes considered appropriate for being a manager, encompassed within the debate on gender and management, would be useful to our discussion. According to Henry Mintzeberg, women were seen less favourably in terms of the knowledge, aptitudes, skills, motivation, interests, temperament, and work habits demanded in most managerial roles.¹²³ As noted in relation to early women managers, their 'success (...) rested on their ability to mask their feminine traits and mimic their male counterparts. They had to forego their personal lives and resign themselves to the fact that the organisation was their family. The more successful they were at concealing any gender differences, the more successful they became at assimilating into the male-dominated professions.'¹²⁴ Such factors regarding the legitimate world were more accentuated in the violent environment of the mafia where masculinity, in its traditional meaning linked to virility, was a fundamental trait.¹²⁵ Therefore, to become leaders women must show those traits society has traditionally linked to masculinity. This was the case of Giuseppina Vitale, who adopted male behaviour to play her leadership role on behalf of her brothers. This habit was the result of the 'contradiction of female power in a patriarchal order',¹²⁶ and was in line with what anthropologist Anton Blok noted in relation to female rulers: 'women leaders had, and still have, to adapt their appearance and imagery to the pattern of "hegemonic masculinity" and, in the process, help to perpetuate it.'¹²⁷ What is striking in Giusy's experience is that, as Public Prosecutor Anna Maria Picozzi told me, during the time she spent in prison Giusy started to express another side of herself, more feminine (in its cultural meaning), which she had to deny while working for the criminal organisation.¹²⁸ In other words, she started to care about her appearance and education. Perhaps her attention to dressing up, and appearing aesthetically 'female', and getting an education was an expression of a sort of liberation from previous constrictions.

As Michele Prestipino observed in relation to Nunzia Graviano, as much as in other cases, the individual psychology of the woman concerned is a significant aspect to be considered in relation to women's shift from being a mere link to having a leading

¹²³Henry Mintzeberg, *The Nature of Manager Work*, Harper and Row, New York, 1973.

¹²⁴*ibid.*, p. 86.

¹²⁵Siebert, *Secrets of Life*, p. 14.

¹²⁶Blok, *Honour and Violence*, p. 220.

¹²⁷*ibid.*, p. 220

¹²⁸Interview with Public Prosecutor Anna Maria Picozzi, Palermo, 5 July 2001.

role.¹²⁹ We cannot explore these matters concerning psychological features in any detail here.

Maria Filippa Messina is a good example of the transition from being a courier, receiving orders from an imprisoned husband, to finally to running the clan with a certain degree of independence. Police began suspecting she had taken over the clan of her husband, Antonino Cintonino, boss of Caltabiano (a small town near Catania), because the clan's illegal activities continued despite the arrests of Cintonino and his fellows in 1993. Maria Filippa came from a mafia family; her cousin Salvatore Messina was boss of Caltabiano and was murdered by the rival clan, led by Cintonino, who had since then, in the early 1990s, become boss of the town. As Catania's investigators explained to me, Caltabiano was a wealthy area, thus Cintonino's business was good (extortion, usury, rigged construction bids and drug trafficking).¹³⁰ When the entire clan was arrested in 1993, management was entrusted to Maria Filippa who was only 25 years old. In the beginning, she was a mere link between her husband and the remaining members of the organisation; she later became more autonomous when her husband went under the strict prison rules of Law 41bis that made communication with him almost impossible. Maria Filippa inherited a critical situation, since there was a gang war in progress with the rival faction known as Carrapipani. The woman decided, with other members of Cintonino's group, to organise the massacre of their rivals. Conversations inside Maria Filippa's home, taped by investigators, give insight into the tension among the members; it is sufficient to quote this phrase: 'let's break these four pieces of shit, cut them down, break them up.'¹³¹ In order to communicate the above decision to her husband, on 27 December 1994 Maria Filippa sent him a telegram written in code: 'My love, I wish time would run faster so I could come to you; my love don't worry, the horses are all inside because it is cold here, everything is O.K. I love you very much.'¹³² Investigators understood this message meant those who were creating problems (*horses*) would have been eliminated (*all inside*). The plan, for which Maria had already employed hit men and ordered weapons from the former Yugoslavia, was halted by Giarre's Carabinieri with the arrest of Maria Filippa who was

¹²⁹Interview with Public Prosecutor Michele Prestipino, Palermo, 10 September 2003.

¹³⁰Interview with Public Prosecutor Flavia Panzano, Catania, 11 September 2003.

¹³¹Sent. n. 33/96, Reg.Gen. 12/97, 185, Cintonino + altri, Tribunale di Catania, Seconda Sezione Corte d'Assise.

¹³²*ibid.*

sentenced to 14 years for mafia association.¹³³ As we will see in the next chapter, she was put in isolation under Law 41 bis.¹³⁴ Her pivotal role clearly emerges from court documents I was able to consult in Catania. Prosecutors wrote that she was ‘the true driving force of the organisation and, as a real boss, she gathered the most prestigious men of the group and with them managed the strategies of the criminal organisation at that moment led by herself.’¹³⁵ In some episodes, she showed the characteristics of a manager; for instance when she wanted to substitute Lizzo, in charge of racketeering, with Intelisano, since Lizzo was on the run. She ‘reiterates that she does not need a “boss” who cannot be on the job.’¹³⁶ Eventually Lizzo was arrested and she nominated Intelisano. All the above factors indicated she held real power; however on closer inspection she appeared to be in difficulty when there were questions of money. Let’s take as an example the following conversation, regarding *la carta* (the paper) containing the list of people extorted by the clan:

Maria: They do not even know where to find him, so no one knows, so you know what you have to do, you tell them they have to contact Saro... You say because your *commare* (godmother) wants the paper, just like that, because you know that at the end of the month there is a lot of money to be collected and so you collect it, because Nino (her husband), as you should know already, received another arrest warrant, so he has to get another two lawyers and the rest and so we need money. This is the first thing and then you ask him what he intends to do and also I want him to give me the pistols if he has them (...).¹³⁷

Intelisano: Maria, you have to do something, you have to talk with your husband, when your husband tells you what you have to do, do it, you act as a consequence, but if you don’t talk to your husband, Saro is still responsible (...) when you have the money in your hand, then you can speak in a loud voice.¹³⁸

Intelisano’s words clearly underlined the fact that Maria Filippa’s power was delegated. Indeed, the magistrate accused Cintorino with the crimes carried out by Maria Filippa and his group: ‘The role maintained by Cintorino within the organisation through his wife, Maria Filippa Messina, permits us to charge him, though he has been in prison for a long time, with responsibility for crimes that were the purpose of this same organisation such as extortion, and unauthorized possession of firearms.’¹³⁹ Maria Filippa is a good case to

¹³³ *ibid.*

¹³⁴ *ibid.*

¹³⁵ *ibid.*

¹³⁶ *ibid.*

¹³⁷ *ibid.*

¹³⁸ *ibid.*

¹³⁹ *ibid.*

illustrate the notion of 'delegated power', a model devised by Teresa Principato and Alessandra Dino.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, judges wrote:

Another characteristic of the organisation was its highly hierarchical structure, with recognition to Ms. Messina, in the role of boss *on behalf of her imprisoned husband*, ("we are under her, so we have to do what she tells us") and the investiture of Gaetano Intelisano with the role of boss instead of Rosario Lizzio, who was imprisoned. ("The boss will be Gaetano, of course what my husband sends me to tell you, we have to do...he told me that he doesn't want any arguments, as soon as I know of any arguments, it will be your fucking problem.").¹⁴¹

Another case of delegated power was that of Giuseppina Sansone, sentenced for mafia association at the first trial, yet acquitted on appeal of the trial. From the documents regarding the public prosecution, it was clear that Giuseppina was a powerful woman who was followed by the members of her husband's mafia Family. However, they showed respect to her simply because she was the wife of Francesco Tagliavia, the emerging boss of Brancaccio, allied with the Corleonesi, arrested in 1993. After his arrest, Francesco continued managing his criminal business by communicating information to his wife during prison meetings. Giuseppina, through her contact with corrupt prison guards, was able to meet Francesco four times a month, during which time they communicated through sign language.¹⁴² Following her husband's orders she ran the arms trade, racketeering, and drug smuggling, and was also in touch with Brancaccio mafia bosses such as the Graviano brothers. Investigators discovered her role by taping prison conversations, even if it was quite difficult to decode their language, in which, for instance, drugs were described as 'caffè' (coffee) or 'farina' (flour), and racketeering victims were referred to with nicknames.¹⁴³

This last section permits us to return to the observations on women's power in the mafia anticipated above. When can women become mafia bosses? Who among mafia women held a position of authority? What is female power like in the mafia?

As emerged from the history of the mafia, in emergency periods women become important pawns even at the top of mafia families. As amply seen, the implementation of article 41 bis, regarding harsh prison conditions, made women one of the main means,

¹⁴⁰Principato, Dino, *Mafia Donna*, pp. 68-69.

¹⁴¹Sent. n. 33/96, Reg.Gen. 12/97, 185, Cintonino + altri, Tribunale di Catania, Seconda Sezione Corte d'Assise, p. 190.

¹⁴²*Corriere della sera*, 20 luglio 1997.

¹⁴³Interview with Public Prosecutor Egidio La Neve, Palermo, 9 July 2001. *Corriere della sera*, 20 luglio, 1997, *La Sicilia*, 20 luglio 1997; *Il resto del Carlino*, 20 luglio 1997.

whereby mafiosi managed to communicate with the outside world from prison.¹⁴⁴ In this function women received orders from their men, yet they were not mere spokeswomen. Indeed, not only did they demonstrate knowledge of everything regarding mafia members and trafficking, but also showed great ability in running their men's clans. As previously argued, such mafia know-how was unlikely to be learnt from one day to the next. Women's knowledge was deep because those women who had been entrusted with such leadership and organisational tasks were women from inside the mafia. This thesis insists on distinguishing whether women were internal or external to the mafia. Internal women, in reference to those who were part of the cultural system composing the mafia, might take part in the criminal system in case the mafia needed them and when demonstrating the ability to do so. On the contrary, external women, namely those not part of the cultural system, could join the criminal structure only marginally, at the very bottom of the organisation. This consideration helps us to answer the second question addressed above.

Women who substituted men at the top of the criminal organisation were always relatives of a boss, including sisters or wives. This seems to suggest that female access to mafia power was similar to the model of women's access to power in undeveloped countries. Here in fact women in power were always daughters, sisters or widows of men who had been in power.¹⁴⁵ In both cases the legitimisation came from their family belonging. This last point brings us to the final question regarding the nature of female power in the mafia. Indeed women could not enter the organisation in leading roles, unless they were relatives of male mafia bosses who were absent from the criminal scene, and during chaotic periods in the criminal organisation.

Being delegated and temporary, women's access to power entailed elements of subordination and exploitation, already observed at other levels of female involvement. Both as couriers and heads of mafia clans, men used women to maintain their power thereby keeping the organisation active. As long as female power was temporary, since it was delegated by men for the time they were in prison, the new female position was not a result of acknowledged 'advancement'. What's more even women holding decision-making positions continued to experience patriarchal domination. This condition was true even in cases of women who showed a strong and quite independent character. In this

¹⁴⁴The most recent cases of women leading mafia business confirmed this pattern, *la Repubblica*, 9 November 2004.

¹⁴⁵Blok reported the case of Indira Ghandi in India, Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan, and Cory Aquino in Philippine, Blok, *Honour and Violence*, p.221.

sense the stories of Giusy Vitale and Nunzia Graviano are emblematic examples: sisters of mafia bosses, their mafia surname gained them a mafia reputation and thus respect from the other members of the mafia Family. Yet, it is clear they were subjugated to their brother's power, as we have seen earlier.

At this point it is essential to stress that observing the victimisation's aspects of the condition of women in the mafia by underlining their exploitation does not justify or neglect their moral and criminal responsibility, since they were completely conscious of being fundamental contributors to the mafia organisation. To make clear the above contradiction it is useful to introduce the concept of *pseudo-emancipation* allowing us to read the apparent independence of women in leadership positions. As anticipated in the introduction, this notion must be used to understand the long-term historical process, which have seen women in the mafia modifying their roles. The term, indeed, helps us to understand this transformation not as an expression of progresses in female status yet as a reproduction of unchanged patterns. Needless to say that it is obvious that the mafia does not recognise equal opportunities to women given the fact that it is based on male chauvinist values. Moreover, as we know from chapter two, the process of female emancipation in Italian society has been incomplete and imperfect, thus it would be foolish to expect a different picture in the mafia. However, the assumption that shift in women's roles inside the mafia was a sign of 'advancement' in female positions is quite widespread at popular and media level. This thesis has proved that the above assumption is not a valid hypothesis. In fact, the evidence showed in this chapter tells us that women's tasks in mafia business are marginal, at the lower ranks, and almost not remunerated. Even at the top level their leadership is temporary and delegated. Moreover, as we know from chapter four, constrictions coming from female traditional roles have not disappeared. Gender relations, based on the patriarchal system, have remained almost intact. In other words, we registered changes in the criminal field and continuity in gender relations.

Articulating such ambiguous condition is a difficult task. Renate Siebert, by referring to Rita Di Giovine's case, defined mafia women as a female pseudo-subject by comparing and contrasting it with a female subject present in the legitimate world. In Siebert's words:

If the historical development of a female subject, although the deep wounds and lacerations accompanied with the processes of emancipation, can be read as a process of liberation from the patriarchal male violence (both in the private and public relations), the social production of a female pseudo-subject (as in the case of the mafia, or in the case of nazi or fascist regime, as in the case of all dominions

based on patriarchal male chauvinism) cannot be, in my view, misunderstood as a process of emancipation.¹⁴⁶

This thesis, instead, suggests that to better understand the contradictions inherent in the identity of mafia women it is appropriate to speak of *pluri-appartenenza identitaria* (multi-belonging identity). This definition allows us to refer to both changes and continuity in the condition of women in the mafia. These, in fact, became 'modern' in terms of the appearance aspects (the body sphere) -they drive cars, travel, dress modern clothing, etc.- whereas they remained traditional in relation to intimate aspects (the mind sphere) -they are strictly controlled by men of the family, experience male oppression, identify womanhood exclusively with marriage and motherhood, etc. In other words, it seems that in the mafia environment women tend to acquire more consumistic aspects of female emancipation rather than those related to democratisation process of female liberation.

The tension occurring between the two spheres might explain the conflicting attitude of mafia women ranging from conscious participation in the mafia to victimisation by male mafia power. Thereby, the definition of multi-belonging identity is capable of embracing also the individual nuances of being a woman in the mafia. Indeed, by assuming such a perspective, we do not run the risk of neglecting an in-depth investigation into women's condition.

Finally, the hypothesis informing this thesis is that the mafia system took advantage of the process of female emancipation taking place in the legal world especially with regards to the increase in female education and in women undertaking jobs traditionally considered male. Such an instrumental use of female emancipation by the male organisation was well illustrated by the case of Cinzia Lipari, who was used by her father because of her professional status (as a lawyer). The same can be said of Nunzia Graviano, who could launder money at the international level because she could speak English and was quite well educated. Therefore, from a current mafia perspective, women are more useful nowadays than in the past due to their progress in education and changes in habits.

In light of the above considerations, studying women and the mafia might bring a useful contribution to the general understanding of the mafia. Scholars always wonder how the mafia can survive in the push toward modernity. As seen in chapter three, according to Raimondo Catanzaro, the mafia survives because of its ability to adapt to modernity by keeping traditional aspects alive. A clear example of this mafia modality is how the mafia

¹⁴⁶Siebert, *Donne di mafia*, in AA.VV., *donne e mafie*, p. 41.

has dealt with the process of female emancipation in the legitimate world, which is part of the process of modernity and, we might say, one of the main hallmarks of a modern society. From the evidence seen above, mafia adaptation to female emancipation has occurred by exploiting it. As we move in this interpretative direction, it becomes evident that the mafia system on the one side has assumed those aspects of female emancipation considered useful, namely those belonging to the body-sphere; and on the other side it has neglected achievements of female liberation concerning mentality, because they would hinder it. In other words, the mafia system has taken advantage of the transformation of women's conditions within society, since the modernization of women's conditions not only made it easier to recruit women into traditional male jobs, including criminal ones, but it also brought an increase in women's education. As seen above, the latter change was particularly convenient to the mafia as part of its development towards a more and more sophisticated criminal organisation. At the same time, the enduring presence of subordinate factors and violence against women indicated that those aspects of female revolution concerning individual rights were not acknowledged within the mafia society in which the gender regime is still embedded. As clarified above, this is not to say that it is surprising that female liberation has not taken place in the mafia. It is just to point out that gender relations in the mafia have not changed, yet are deeply imbued with patriarchal dynamics.

When we speak of 'exploitation', we refer to the fact that the mafia system has gained advantages from the degree of female emancipation, that has occurred over the last thirty years, by giving women very little in return. Generally speaking, it seems that women's rewards were in terms of goods (furs, jewellery, cars, houses, etc.) and not in terms of individual respect. This exploitive face of the changes in women's status in the mafia emerges better by comparing the mafia with the lawful world. Here women used their progress in education for their own aims; while in the mafia, women used their new skills and functions, derived from the transformation of the role of women in society, in order to carry out mafia jobs which would bring them only material advantages. As we have amply seen, women have been involved in mafia activities, some at top-level positions, because male relatives needed them. Therefore, this kind of involvement is different from an educated woman entering a company in the lawful world, and using her education for a personal career and economic independence.

CHAPTER SIX

Mafia Women and the Criminal Justice System

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the relationship between mafia women and the criminal justice system in the light of some of the theories on female crime analysed in chapter one. Feminist criminological thought, in particular, provides us with useful heuristic tools with which to examine what we underlined in the previous chapter, namely that the assumption that women play an exclusively traditional role, linked to the domestic realm, does not completely mirror reality. In other words, the critique addressed by feminist criminologists to mainstream criminology in studying female crime - amnesia or distortion - can be also directed to mainstream mafia studies. These either neglected to look at the role of women in the mafia or, if they dealt with it, misrepresented it, leading society to believe women did not take part in illegal mafia operations and were ignorant of the activities of their men folk. Such a misconception led to serious policy errors since the mafia exploited the above prejudice by using women in illegal operations much earlier than investigators believed.

The argument running in this chapter is based more on qualitative sources than on quantitative ones. However, the chapter is followed by a statistical appendix to give the reader an idea of the official numbers regarding mafia women.

The new wave of mafia studies in the 1990s' revealed the participation of women in mafia activities. Magistrate Teresa Principato and sociologist Alessandra Dino believed that women had held crucial positions in the mafia even in the past, yet their participation was invisible.¹ This reality remained hidden until public officials started to investigate women involved actively in the mafia.² Moreover, the criminal justice system's attitude towards mafia women shifted from charging them merely with aiding and abetting (*favoreggiamento*) to prosecuting them with mafia membership.

This chapter will take into account, firstly, those factors contributing to the creation of the distorted image, which misled investigators. Secondly, it will address investigators'

¹Principato, Dino, *Mafia donna*, pp. 41-86.

²Principato, *La donna.nell'universo mafioso: storia di una centralità sommersa*.

increasing focus on mafia women as a consequence of the deconstruction of the traditional image. Finally, it will warn about the possible risk of creating another distorted picture, which might lead to considering mafia women responsible *a priori* and neglecting those subordinate factors many of them experience. For this reason, the last part of this chapter will point out that interpreting the numerous ways of being a woman in the mafia requires a balanced approach.

6.1. *Women's impunity as a result of considering women removed from criminal behaviour and confined to their traditional roles*

What mainly contributed to misrepresenting mafia women was the fact that the mafia was studied by men who tended to believe the mafiosi description of the female universe. This is not to underestimate the value of the testimonies from men who turned state's evidence. As we will see in the next chapter, there is no doubt that better knowledge of the mafia has been acquired since the 1980s when scholars gained access to the confessions of *pentiti*. The mafia is a secret, criminal organisation that leaves no written sources; yet, thanks to *pentiti*, we gained internal information about the functioning of the criminal organisation. Moreover, *pentiti* talked about the mentality and ideology informing the so-called 'honoured society', including attitudes towards women, gender norms and female roles.³ However, their version was partial and misleading in this regard. That is why their assertions in this thesis were integrated with anthropological and judicially evidence.

Let's take as an example Tommaso Buscetta's portrait of a mafia boss's wife:

She is the imprint of her husband. She doesn't talk, because he's trained her to be silent. She does not need to know the home's business; she must remain within her own world. We do not know whether she is happy, because she will not talk to anybody. Her life is closed within her spouse's circle, from which she cannot leave.⁴

'Men of honour' told male experts on the mafia that women were formally and practically excluded from mafia membership.⁵ In other words, in order to join the mafia the candidate must be rigorously male. Furthermore, the initiation ceremony that made the candidate a man of honour involved swearing on many rules including those concerning

³See chapter four of this thesis and Valeria Pezzini Gambetta, 'Gender Norms in the Sicilian Mafia 1945-1986', in M.L. Arnot and C. Usborne (eds), *Gender and Crime in Modern Europe*, UCL, London, 1999.

⁴Enzo Biagi, *Il boss è solo*, Mondadori, Milano, 1990, p.111.

⁵Siebert, *Secrets of Life*, p.13.

women. As anticipated in chapter four, one important mafia rule was not talking to women about mafia business.⁶

In theory, women were excluded from the criminal organisation; however, the stories described in this thesis show us that, in practical terms, the aforementioned formal rules did not bar women's entry into mafia activities. The aim of mafiosi in depicting women as external to the criminal structure of the mafia was both ideological and practical. On the one hand, they wanted to show their macho association did not need women's support, and, on the other, they wanted to safeguard women from police investigation. Journalist Liliana Madeo rightly observed that: 'mafiosi were always able to keep their women away from police investigations, thereby remaining clean of the criminal activities in which men were involved.'⁷ Moreover, mafiosi showed themselves jealous of their private life. One of the reasons Totò Riina felt constrained to order the murder of journalist Mario Francese in the 1970s was the fact he was investigating his private life.⁸

The uncritical reading of mafiosi comments about women led scholars and journalists to underestimate the participation of women in the mafia. Since law, justice and punishment are part of society, there is no doubt that the prevailing image of mafia women within society influenced the criminal justice system, which ended up being more lenient towards women. Thereby investigators employed the internal mafia point of view by taking for granted the picture given by mafiosi. Criminal law Professor Giovanni Fiandaca observed that, 'An interpretative-applicative orientation which claims to take as a point of reference the Cosa Nostra's internal point of view must or can conclude that a woman cannot be charged with mafia membership, because it seems that the Cosa Nostra's judicial structure excluded –and still excludes- the formal affiliation of women to the mafia.'⁹ Later on, I will return to this point regarding the connection between formal mafia affiliation and actual participation in the mafia.

The internal image portrayed by mafiosi of the female realm within the mafia corresponds to the role Italian society expected women to play as mothers. Indeed, as underlined in chapter two, Italian society traditionally gave great importance to

⁶For a detailed description of formal gender rules in the mafia since 1945 see Pezzini Gambetta, 'Gender Norms', in Arnot and Osborne, *Gender and Crime*.

⁷*Giornale di Sicilia*, 27 Giugno 1998.

⁸Interview with Public Prosecutor Laura Vaccaro, Palermo, 5 September 2003.

⁹Giovanni Fiandaca, 'La discriminante sessuale tra paradigmi giudiziari e paradigmi culturali', paper Conference *La donna nell'universo mafioso*, Palermo 8-9 Febbraio 1997, published in *Segno*, anno XXIII, 183, 1997, p. 4.

motherhood. Social reaction had an impact on the criminal justice system that tended to see women as removed from delinquent behaviour and define mafia women as merely wives and mothers. As Giovanni Fiandaca pointed out, judges were conditioned by 'the concern to make their judicial decisions socially acceptable. In this sense, magistrates opted for the thesis of penal irresponsibility of woman-spouse-mother because they considered that it corresponded to people's expectations, especially in Southern Italy.'¹⁰

The issues presented so far can be approached through the labelling-oriented analysis seen in the first chapter. In the case of the mafia woman, the fact that most of the time she is a 'secret deviant' (someone who breaks a rule but is not witnessed and therefore not labelled as such) gave her a positive label. Undoubtedly, in most of the cases this positive label resulted in a more lenient treatment by the criminal justice system. The following case will give the reader a clear example of what we mean by 'secret deviant'. Until her role was discovered by investigators, Cinzia Lipari was a typical example of a secret deviant. This was due to the fact she was a woman and a lawyer. In other words, her sex and professional status masked her criminality. Indeed, people with clean records, yet who were involved in mafia activities run by Giuseppe Lipari, preferred to deal with her rather than her father, as in the case of Bernardo Provenzano's figurehead, Di Miceli.¹¹

As seen in chapter one, debates over the criminal justice system's response to female offenders date back to early theorists of female crime, who hold the 'chivalry thesis', namely that women's treatment by the criminal justice system was more lenient compared to that reserved for men.¹² Evaluating potential differential gender treatment in the penal system '... is a puzzle that has challenged dozens of researchers for decades.'¹³ Since the 1970s, this issue became of interest to feminist criminology; as explained in chapter one, feminist scholars were divided between those who maintained that female criminals were preferentially treated, while explaining the attitude of the criminal justice system as patriarchal; and those who thought women were treated more harshly compared to men due to their sex.¹⁴

¹⁰*ibid.*

¹¹Richiesta per l'applicazione di misure cautelari, Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia di Palermo (Proc. n. 3157/98)

¹²Thomas, *The Unadjusted Girl*; Otto Pollack, *The Criminality of Women*.

¹³Frank H. Julian, 'Gender and Crime: Different Sex, Different treatment?', in Culliver, *Female Criminality*, p.343.

¹⁴For these positions see chapter one of this thesis.

In the case of mafia women, there are good grounds for sustaining that the chivalry thesis can be verified at the level of both arrest and sentencing. Even if differential treatment is more unlikely to be proven at the investigation level, namely 'preventive arrest', we can reach some conclusions by collecting first hand testimonies. The statement of Rita Di Giovine, the *pentita* I interviewed, is interesting in this sense.¹⁵ During our encounter, she insisted on telling me women were rarely investigated by police, therefore many jobs were entrusted to women, which suggests that the mafia took advantage of criminal investigators' myopia. A clear example of this was the use of housewives as drug couriers, as seen in the previous chapter. As reported by Marina Pino, male drug traffickers assured these women by saying: 'Go, stay calm, there won't be any problems. You are female so nobody will check you. Even if they discover you, what could happen to you? You are not involved in the business; you are only doing a favour. If something goes wrong, at most we will post bail and you will be out of prison.'¹⁶ As mentioned in the previous chapter, Vincenzo La Piana and Vittorio Foschini confirmed that the use of women in drug trafficking was due to their invisibility.¹⁷

Generally speaking, mafia women experienced lenient treatment by investigators. Public Prosecutor Flavia Panzano, during an interview with me, observed that Public Prosecutors tended to charge women, solely with aiding and abetting mafia men (*reato di favoreggiamento*), provided for under Article 378 of the Italian penal code.¹⁸ More significantly, according to Article 384, the relatives of the culprit cannot be prosecuted with the offence of abetting. Thereby, female relatives of mafiosi often obtain impunity even though deeply involved in the mafia.

Moving from the level of arrest to sentencing, a significant case of a 'chivalrous' act occurred with Francesca Citarda, wife of mafia boss Giovanni Bontade and daughter of another important boss, Matteo Citarda. In May 1983, the Palermo Court did not accept the Prosecutor's request to impose so-called 'preventive measures' on her, created for socially dangerous persons such as mafia suspects. Furthermore, they did not proceed with the annulment of the mortgage taken out on assets for Anna Maria Di Bartolo, wife of Domenico Federico, a mafioso linked to the Bontade clan. According to the judges, those women, being Sicilian and wives of mafiosi, had not reached a sufficient degree of

¹⁵Interview with Rita Di Giovine, Milan, 24 April 1998.

¹⁶Pino, *Le signore della droga*, p. 34.

¹⁷Interview with Vincenzo La Piana, Bologna, 2 April 2004.

¹⁸Interview with Public Prosecutor Flavia Panzano, Catania, 11 September 2003.

emancipation to be allowed involvement in criminal activities. It is evident from this argument that sexism and paternalism lay behind chivalric attitudes, as shown by part of the ruling quoted below:

The family bond in itself is not enough to identify a mafioso subject, although it can be used to qualify particular behaviour or to facilitate the subject's entry into a mafia-type organisation. Nevertheless, it must always be the conduct of the subject in its most diverse behavioural manifestations which should be considered, especially when, *because of personal character and attitudes, the customs of a milieu and, even more, the lack of emancipation from traditional male power*, the person concerned is structurally held back from taking on an active role in family affairs and at the same time has to be subject to or at least accept the decisions of others.¹⁹

Judges clearly employed the *mafiosi* point of view, thus grounding their judgment on the male chauvinism of *mafiosi*.

(Those women) from longstanding custom which is logically rooted in the conservative and masculinist concept of the Mafioso organisation, have so far been by their own wishes kept away from the family "business" and projects, only going so far as to share in certain "values", underlying their own *omertà* and, when required, carrying out those actions which are in the interests of their male relatives.²⁰

More than this, judges's conclusions mirrored not only the mafiosi perspective but also society's expectations. This appears clear by considering the fact that there was substantial proof of women's criminal involvement, and from the words used in the ruling:

Counsel does not deem that it can unreservedly state –as is instead proposed- that the woman belonging to a mafia family will as yet have assumed such a degree of emancipation and authority as to free herself of the subaltern and passive role which in the past she had always enacted in relation to her "man", whether in an equal participation or at any rate with independence and autonomous choice in the affairs which involve the male family "clan".²¹

Finally, judges regarded women's financial involvement an act of male constraint and the result of a widespread custom:

That Di Bartolo furthermore indirectly profited from the alleged illegal activity of her husband, in the form of a high standard of living or substantial purchased assets held by her spouse in her name, is a situation which, regardless, cannot be credited

¹⁹Prima sezione del Tribunale di Palermo, Sentenza, Misure di prevenzione nei confronti di persone socialmente pericolose, Maggio 1983. Presidente della sezione Michele Mezzatesta, giudici a latere Salvatore Scaduti e Giovanni Perrino. The translation of the judges' ruling is borrowed from Siebert, *Secrets of Life*, pp. 118-119. The Italics is mine.

²⁰*ibid.*

²¹*ibid.*

to any independence in the way she leads her life, although it is objectively dependent on her own "status" as the spouse of Domenico Federico, a position which is in itself not open to criminal charges or sanctions (...). Finally, allowing that even judgement at a purely circumstantial level of Di Bartolo's involvement in undertakings of a verifiably suspect entrepreneurial nature cannot exclude consideration that it is a widespread social custom, especially in our part of the country, and normally a legal one, to register trading licences or joint interests in commercial business or activities in the name of women, wives in particular. From this, however, there can be no controvertible conclusion of the woman's conscious and established involvement in the legal or illegal activities of the company for which she has been called upon by her husband to act as a figurehead, especially when, as is usual, either through lack of basic technical-financial knowledge or through a traditional and innate unfamiliarity with the difficult world of business, it is likely that Di Bartolo left it entirely up to her husband to run the company.²²

What is striking is the fact that in spite of the existing evidence of their mafia involvement, these women were not judged liable, since they were merely wives; thereby magistrates neglected the women's individualities. As Renate Siebert commented: 'According to the lesson handed down by these judges, criminal complicity is not punishable if it is sanctified by the ideology of the patriarchal family.'²³

A similar justification was given to exclude female criminal involvement for Anna Colizzi, Antonietta Giustolisi, and Anna Ianni in the Palermo maxi-trial, in the early 1980s. Siebert observed that, 'at different levels, all four have shown a degree of involvement in illegal trafficking, which is proved by intercepted telephone calls, although subsequently they were all either discharged, found not guilty or given amnesty.'²⁴ According to Giovanni Fiandaca, jurisprudence adopted the thesis of traditional socio-criminological constraint. In other words, when weighing the decision of discharging women with mafia association, albeit with positive evidence, judges assumed that a somewhat socio-cultural incompatibility existed between the mafia mentality on women and the possibility that women might play a criminal role. There is no doubt that in underestimating women's personal liability, grounded on a supposed lack of emancipation among Southern Italian women, judges were influenced by the male chauvinist bias and stereotypes of the surrounding society.²⁵

Among the numerous reactions against the above ruling, the one initiated by the Catania branch of the national feminist organisation *Unione Donne Italiane* (UDI) was the most

²² *ibid.*

²³ *ibid.*, p.120.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.114.

²⁵ Giovanni Fiandaca, 'La discriminante sessuale', p. 9.

penetrating. UDI representatives sent a letter to important governmental and judicial bodies, arguing that women had not been charged because of their sex, which made them unable to be responsible for their behaviour. 'In this ruling the female accomplice was treated as a person without will or responsibility, as a sort of parasite, almost as a mentally disabled person.'²⁶

Looking at the whole question, the conclusion is that society did not want to admit that women (mothers and wives) were able to commit crimes. The reduction of womanhood to motherhood led to a covering up of real female criminal involvement. It could therefore be argued, along with Otto Pollak, that female conformity to law is sometimes not the result of women's estrangement from criminal deeds but the consequence of their impunity due to widespread social prejudices. Moreover, rulings such as the one quoted above undermined the Rognoni-La Torre law, because many mafiosi's assets were registered under women's names. As the UDI argued:

And this is not just something symbolic; is it not apparent that this judgement will encourage the widespread custom of registering mafia assets with the women of the family? Is this not a further dangerous attack against the fundamental principle of the La Torre law, and a way of rendering its application futile in those cases in which it is only through controls and action on family assets that mafiosi can be reached? Can it not also be judged that even 'irregular' involvement in mafia activity can be deemed a crime?²⁷

Moreover, as already pointed out, the attachment of a positive label to mafia women by the criminal justice system obviously benefited mafia activities. Teresa Principato explained this consequence:

There is no doubt that this "invisibility" which has characterized mafia women so far guaranteed Cosa Nostra that those women involved in its activities would not be punished. Usually these activities were not acknowledged as socially dangerous and not chargeable as mafia membership. Protected by cultural bias, which reserved them a sort of impunity, women kept acquiring more and more space within the criminal context until they occupied pivotal functions inside Cosa Nostra's illicit businesses, particularly in the financial and economical sector.'²⁸

Furthemore, rulings such as the one above encouraged lawyers, defending women charged with mafia-related crimes to employ defensive techniques based on depicting their clients as mere wives, ignorant and subordinate to their husbands, and therefore not liable. An interesting example of this was the defence of Livia De Martino whose criminal

²⁶Siebert, *Secrets of Life*, p.187.

²⁷Siebert, *Secrets of Life*, p. 121.

²⁸Principato, Dino, *Mafia donna*, pp. 22-23.

profile, as seen in the previous chapter, clashed with the traditional image of the mafia woman. At her trial, she played the role of the victim; however, judges uncovered her strategy, as they explained:

The defendant grounded her defence on being Antonio Di Giovine's wife, by sustaining that the relationships she had were only ones of kinship and could not be linked with drug trafficking. She sustained that she devoted her life exclusively to looking after her children and carrying out intense, legal work, whereby she could purchase apartments and commercial businesses, including the famous bar located on Via Ippolito Nievo.²⁹

In relation to legal defence based on the traditional image of mafia women, the so-called *memoriali* written by defendants in order to claim their innocence are also interesting. A good example is that of Saveria Palazzolo, Bernardo Provenzano's partner, who aimed to justify her economic properties. Saveria had been involved in his business since the 1970s, as outlined in Gariffo's report, as mentioned in chapter five. The report explained Saveria's role in managing her partner's money by buying proprieties and setting up companies. In doing this job, she was assisted by Cosa Nostra accountant Giuseppe Mandalari. From December 1972 to April 1973, she bought real estate for a large sum of money, which she later sold through Mandalari's office to the SEIMEZ Company,³⁰ which laundered mafia money. Saveria was also one of Italcostruzioni S.R.L.'s shareholders because her presence guaranteed the company public bids and funds from banks. According to trial documents, the company, 'with its fiduciary guarantee, was able to obtain 50 million lire in credit from the Bank of Sicily and 20 million from the Cassa di Risparmio.'³¹ In 1983, investigators issued a warrant for Saveria's arrest, but she ran away.³² Initially, she was charged with mafia association but later was sentenced with *ricettazione* (receiving illegal money or stolen goods), a less serious offence.³³ From the evidence collected by the Public Prosecutor, Saveria's financial role seemed quite different from the one she described in the *memoriale* (memorandum) she sent to the judges while she was on the run.³⁴ Indeed, the *memoriale* did not persuade judges, who wrote in the ruling: 'We found enough evidence of the offence for which Saveria Palazzolo was charged. It is almost impossible that, as she argued in the *memoriale*, she went from having no property to possessing such a

²⁹Prima Corte d'Assise di Milano, Sentenza N.16/94, 4 settembre 1997.

³⁰Tribunale di Palermo, Ufficio del giudice istruttore Giuseppe Di Lello, Sentenza del 23 ottobre 1989.

³¹*ibid.*, p. 88.

³²Mandato di cattura n. 253 del 29-11-1983 (Vol.1/T f.273)

³³Tribunale di Palermo, Ufficio del giudice istruttore Giuseppe Di Lello, Sentenza del 23 ottobre 1989; Corte di Appello di Palermo, Sentenza n.516 La Fiura Filippa + altri, 18 Dicembre 1994.

³⁴Oliva, Palazzolo, *L'altra mafia*.

considerable estate. This rise in economic status in such a short time cannot have occurred solely through an aunt's gift and her work as a dressmaker.³⁵ Unlike Saveria's defence, Maria Concetta Imbraguglia eventually convinced her judges.³⁶ The Public Prosecutor had requested she be sentenced on the basis of her full participation in companies and her husband's office.³⁷ Despite the accurate elements of the prosecution, judges believed Maria Imbraguglia's claim and thus acquitted her in 1994. Let's look at her defence:

Although I had a degree in accountancy, until 1991 I only marginally helped my husband Giuseppe Mandalari in his office. I limited myself to signing a few documents that he gave me, neglecting to read the content. This was because I trusted my husband and I was only a housewife until 1991. Since then, after the death of my daughter, I started to go to my husband's office more often in order to take my mind off things and to replace some of the staff that my husband was compelled to fire due to economic reasons. From what I said above, it is clear that I do not know anything about the companies quoted in the *ordinanza di custodia cautelare*, the companies' names, or anything about their shareholders.³⁸

Even in an interview with journalist Clare Longrigg, she played the role of the ignorant wife, as she did in court. 'I didn't do anything. My husband knew what I thought, he voted for me at meetings. My husband put me on the board because it would look good on my résumé.'³⁹

Another case of acquittal, which may have influenced by the gender of the defendant, concerned Maria Grazia Ribisi, who took part in the mafia feud in Palma di Montechiaro (a village near Agrigento). Maria Grazia was charged with mafia association but then acquitted as a consequence of careless consideration by the judges of the evidence presented by the Prosecutor.⁴⁰ On the contrary, Teresa Principato maintained there was important circumstantial evidence, aside from being related to the protagonists in the feud, which should have resulted in the woman being condemned.⁴¹

Once again, the cases of 'chivalry' reported above can be read as examples of the male chauvinistic attitude of the criminal justice system embedded in the general social attitude. Some observers argued that showing chivalrous behaviour toward women when judging their criminal deeds denied them the right to be bad. Paola Corso, during the first

³⁵*ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

³⁶Principato, Dino, *Mafia donna*, p. 52.

³⁷*ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

³⁸Tribunale di Palermo -Giudice per le indagini preliminari- Interrogatorio di Maria Concetta Imbraguglia, 15-12-1994, *ibid.*, p. 53.

³⁹Longrigg, *Mafia Women*, p.153.

⁴⁰Tribunale di Agrigento, Sentenza del 5-7-1994, in Principato, Dino, *Mafia donna*, p.55.

⁴¹*ibid.*, p. 54.

symposium on mafia women in 1997, maintained that 'the right to be bad is denied' to women, and therefore it is necessary to 'give women back their dignity by sentencing them.'⁴²In my view, being bad is not a right, however it is linked to the right to choose to assume a given behaviour, including a criminal one. The central point to be made here is not a woman's right to be bad, but the fact that the criminal justice system often did not consider that women were 'intelligent' enough to make decisions. On the contrary women showed themselves particularly clever in exploiting the judges' assumption of their stupidity. The above interpretative direction, can be made clearer by asserting that the ideology underpinning the 'chivalrous' attitude of investigators was sexist. Women in the mafia are not stupid, despite the fact they are subordinate to patriarchal power, however it is not a sufficient argument to maintain their estrangement from criminal involvement. In other words, even if their role was passive they could not be considered mentally disabled. The victimization of women in the mafia is a general consideration and should not impinge upon the decisions of the criminal justice system, which must instead evaluate individual behaviour.

In looking at the course of the investigators' attitude, we noted that since the 1990s there has been much more attention paid to judging individual situations and avoiding sociological generalisations which had in the past led to the acquittal of women charged with mafia-related crimes.

Some feminists, such as Carol Smart, argue that 'equality feminism misunderstands the nature of law and the state and naively asks for equal treatment on the assumption that it will improve things', instead 'evidence indicates that equality legislation only improves things for men.'⁴³Contrary to this line of argument, my research supports those scholars who call for equality between men and women before the law, since women who commit a crime do not have 'limited liability' just because they are women.

⁴²Paola Corso, 'Alle donne non è consentita l'aggressività', in AA.VV., *Dal materno al mafioso*, p. 23.

⁴³C. MacKinnon *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1987 and J. Fudge, 'The effect of entrenching a Bill of Rights upon political discourse: feminist demands and sexual violence in Canada', *International Journal of the Sociology of Law*, 17, 4, 1990, pp. 445-463. Carol Smart, *Women and Crime*, p. 84.

6. 2. *Shift in perspective: starting to charge women with mafia association*

The chivalry thesis emerging from the qualitative sources analysed so far has also partly surfaced in official figures. There has been an increase in women reported and charged with mafia related crime especially in the past ten years.⁴⁴ Although the growth has not been as high as the media suggested, it is significant that it occurred in a very short time, therefore it was also related to the increasing realisation that women were seen as equal under the law.

The shift in the attitude of the criminal justice system towards mafia women has been influenced by the change in labelling mafia women: the traditional image, which guaranteed them impunity, has been partly deconstructed. Therefore, we will move to analyse the web of factors leading investigators to recognise that women can be involved in mafia operations beyond their traditional tasks.

The first aspect to be underlined is the broader change in social reaction to women's criminal behaviour as the upshot of the evolution of social gender expectations. The increased expectations that women can fulfil a number of male roles and occupations for which they were regarded as unsuitable in the past, and vice versa, made women more likely to be defined as *mafiose* if they were involved in a mafia criminal association. This female behaviour, however, continued to arouse social surprise, as shown in the following newspaper article published in 1998 when Mariastella Madonia and Giovanna Santoro, sister and wife of mafia boss Piddu Madonia, were captured:

In spite of everything, we must confess that we feel embarrassed every time people talk about women charged with mafia association: seeing women in prison, even put in isolation, mothers and sisters of mafia bosses, is upsetting. Because a woman is different from a man in terms of character; we think that she is devoted only to her children; we cannot imagine her giving orders or being at the same level of murderers and robbers.⁴⁵

Secondly, criminal investigators started to prosecute women, as the consequence of an actual increase in women involved in mafia-related crime. As seen in the previous chapters, this growth was due to the mafia's need for female labour and the general change in women's positions within Italian society. In addition, investigators started to understand that women have a more crucial role than they thought in the past by noticing that often,

⁴⁴See statistical appendix to this chapter.

⁴⁵Tony Zermo, 'La rivoluzione dei ruoli', *La Sicilia*, 28 marzo 1998

despite the arrest of mafia bosses and their fellows, the activities of the clan continued. In this regard, the case of Maria Filippa Messina was exemplary.

Moreover, the enactment of the Rognoni-La Torre Law in 1982 had the effect of increasing the number of investigations into women involved in the mafia. As explained above, the law permitted officials to carry out accurate financial investigations, and thus to discover women who were *prestanomi* (figure-heads). Moreover, the law permitted investigations into people who helped the criminal association, thus enabling magistrates to bypass the simple charge of abetting.

Another important further step towards a more equal view of mafia women was related to the modernisation of the legal system that stopped considering formal affiliation as a condition *sine qua non* of assessing mafia membership. Thereby, the legal system showed itself adaptable to the new mafia policy of recruiting people without affiliating them through the initiation rite due to their need for workers. Examples of these new judicial perspective can be found in the document charging those who helped Provenzano communicate through a 'sistema dei bigliettini' (a system of notes). Provenzano's notes were 'delivered, received and sorted through very private "channels", that had made this activity essential to their being part of the mafia organization.'⁴⁶ Numerous pentiti confirmed cases of mafia involvement without formal affiliation by reporting, 'that although they did not swear ritually, they were anyway part of the mafia association inasmuch as they knew some of its members directly, even important ones; they committed crimes for the associations, and knew about the everyday criminal activity carried out by its members.' Pentito Vincenzo La Piana told me that he was not formally affiliated but he participated in most mafia business. Interestingly for this thesis, he stated that he did not need to be affiliated because he was married to Marisa Alberti, niece of the important mafia boss Gerlando Alberti.⁴⁷ Marisa is a good example of a woman who was internal to the mafia and as such could introduce her husband into the Alberti mafia clan. The true reason for La Piana's 'non-affiliation' lies in the fact he had many relatives who were investigators and the criminal organisation forbids formal affiliation of people who have '*sbirri*' (cops) in their family. At the judicial level, no difference existed between being affiliated or not; however, at the mafia level the affiliated member knows more inside

⁴⁶Richiesta per l'applicazione di misure cautelari, Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia di Palermo (Proc. n. 3157/98).

⁴⁷Interview with Vincenzo La Piana, Bologna, 4 April 2004.

information than a person who merely participates in mafia business. In other words, people who are not affiliated cannot be formally considered members of the organisation even though they work for it. Since women could not be affiliated, the new direction of jurisprudence eliminated the main investigators' prejudice against considering women part of the criminal organisation, even if they had committed crimes. The documents regarding Nunzia Graviano and Gisella Greco thoroughly showed how formal affiliation was no longer considered the main proof of mafia involvement; thereby, the major pretext for discharging women collapsed.

An important turning point in focussing criminal prosecution on female mafia involvement was the sentence against *Nonna Eroina*: in 1985, Angela Russo was sentenced to five years for criminal association regarding drug trafficking; the ruling was confirmed in March 1987.⁴⁸ Indeed, there is no doubt that the view that women could be part of the mafia started between the late 1980s and early 1990s, as shown by the cases below. However, we will also notice some opposition still existed against full acknowledgement of female involvement in the mafia, thus keeping alive the tradition of a 'chivalrous' attitude.

As anticipated above, some scholars who dealt with female crime maintained that the supposed gender-specific treatment by the criminal justice system was almost impossible to support with strong evidence because the reality of arrest, trial and punishment involves many factors.⁴⁹ Indeed not only the gender of the defendant might influence the attitudes of operators of the criminal justice system but also other variables such as the class and race of the defendant. Yet, this is not the case with the crime of mafia association, at least at the court level. In fact, this type of crime, by definition, was committed by a group of people coming from the same family and social background. This common condition allowed us to take into consideration only the gender variable and thus verify whether women were treated differently without worrying about the other factors. In other words some variables, such as class and race, which may influence the court's response, can be reduced given the fact that the people involved in the mafia clan often came from the same environment.

A good way to understand the above discussion is to concentrate on those court cases that charge men and women from the same family, such as the case of Giuseppina

⁴⁸Tribunale di Palermo, III Sezione, Sentenza n.319/85; II Sezione della Corte d'Appello di Palermo Sentenza (11.1.1986), quoted in Principato, Dino, *Mafia Donna*, p. 65.

⁴⁹Clarice Feinman, *Women in the Criminal Justice*

Sansone. This example thoroughly illustrates the tendency to condemn women with contributing to the association (*concorso esterno in associazione mafiosa*) rather than with full mafia membership (*partecipazione ad associazione mafiosa*). Judges wary of the supposed social reaction thought it more appropriate to judge women's conduct in terms of contributing, aiding and abetting, rather than in terms of full involvement. Giuseppina Sansone, condemned at the first trial and later discharged on appeal,⁵⁰ was sentenced with *concorso* (contributing to the association), whereas her son, who had the same tasks as his mother, was sentenced with full membership. By comparing the two positions, we can state that the different treatment was due to the sex of the defendants. As described in trial documents, Giuseppina's role was crucial for the survival of the Family of her husband, Francesco Tagliavia, since she was the link between him in prison and his fellows outside.

la stessa utilizza i colloqui riservati ai famigliari per mettere continuamente al corrente il Tagliavia su tutti i fatti e affari illeciti della "famiglia" mafiosa di Corso dei Mille, costituendo un tramite essenziale tra questi e gli uomini d'onore liberi, trasmettendo le notizie, direttive e gli ordini necessari per l'organizzazione e gestione di tali affari, in particolare delle estorsioni in danno degli esercizi commerciali del territorio di competenza, partecipando anche direttamente, come alter ego del marito, custodendo il ricavato delle estorsioni e, su indicazione di questi, provvedendo alla sua ripartizione.⁵¹

Nonetheless, the judges only sentenced her for aiding the criminal association, which was undergoing a crisis due to her husband's arrest. As a result, Giuseppina's role was defined as temporary.

..la Sansone attualmente costituisce un vero e proprio canale di collegamento tra il Tagliavia e il mondo esterno e (...) la stessa partecipa personalmente alla gestione delle attività illecite della *famiglia* di Corso dei Mille.

Senza voler, almeno in questa fase, argomentare in ordine a problemi di tipo sociologico-criminale inerenti l'inserimento di una donna in seno alle attività criminali di una *famiglia* mafiosa, non può però non osservarsi come tale fatto, apparentemente anomalo, si inserisce in un contesto che può definirsi, per usare le parole delle Sezioni Unite della Suprema Corte in tema di concorso esterno nel reato associativo, di *fibrillazione del consortium sceleris* - e - si spiega agevolmente con evidenti ragioni di autotutela dell'associazione che, nel periodo compreso tra la metà del 1995 e tutto il 1996,

⁵⁰Not only Giuseppina was acquitted but also her husband by the Corte d'Appello di Palermo, President Salvatore Scaduti, Ansa, 18 Maggio 2001.

⁵¹She used the prison meetings for relatives to keep Tagliavia informed of all the illegal business of the mafia family on Corso dei Mille. Thus she constituted an essential link between him and the free men of honour by transmitting the news and orders which were necessary to manage the business. In particular the racketeering within the territory of which Tagliavia was in charge, by also participating directly as her husband's alter ego, by hiding the protection money, and distributing it, according to her husband's orders. Ordinanza di custodia cautelare in carcere, Ufficio del Giudice per le indagini preliminari, Tribunale di Palermo, n.3142/97, p. 4.

era stata, nel *mandamento* di Brancaccio-Ciaculli, letteralmente falciata dall'attività investigativa sviluppata a seguito delle dissociazioni di numerosi appartenenti alla medesima; di conseguenza, anche a costo di rinunciare ad una certa libertà di movimento, i vertici del sodalizio hanno preferito puntare sull'esistente e non avvalersi di nuovi apporti che se, da un lato, avrebbero consentito una maggiore efficacia operativa, dall'altro, non avrebbero dato quelle garanzie di riservatezza e di tenuta necessarie a garantire la necessaria segretezza dell'operato dell'associazione mafiosa⁵²

Rightly, judges underlined that female participation was brought about by emergency circumstances; however, what they underestimated was the extent of female involvement by considering it casual and scattered. This superficial understanding was because they did not take into consideration that women had already been trained in mafia business in order to assume important roles in times of crisis. During these times, female participation grew and became more visible because their men were in prison or in hiding. As the Prosecutor himself noted: '(...) what Sansone said perfectly demonstrated that she knew about the internal dynamics of the mafia.'⁵³ Then he outlined that: 'Sansone is not only perfectly aware of the criminal activities run by her relatives, but also performs a primary role in the management of the various criminal activities which, moreover, did not limit themselves to carrying out extortion and damaging, but also they were concerned with other criminal sectors, such as drug trafficking.'⁵⁴ The Prosecutor concluded that Giuseppina could be charged with full mafia membership if she were a man: 'In the case under inquiry, *if we were not dealing with a woman* and as such a subject who, according to well-known Cosa Nostra rules, cannot be a member of the mafia association, there would be no doubt that the facts regarding this woman would be more than enough to prove her membership in the criminal organisation.'⁵⁵ By taking for granted the '*note regole di Cosa Nostra*' (well-

⁵² At the moment Sansone is the main link between Tagliavia and the outside world and she personally takes part in managing the illicit activities of the Corso dei Mille Family.

Without wanting to discuss socio-criminal issues concerning the presence of a woman within the criminal activities of a mafia family, we cannot observe that this fact, which apparently is anomalous, is part of a context that we can define, along with *Sezioni Unite della Suprema corte* on external contribution to the criminal association, as a moment of crisis, *consortium sceleris* –and- it can be explained easily with evident reasons of the association's self-defence, which in the period between mid-1995 and 1996 in the Brancaccio-Ciaculli *mandamento* was hit by investigative activity following the numerous defections of members of the association; as a consequence, even by sacrificing a certain freedom of movement, the leaders of the association preferred to use labourers they already had instead of new ones. These, in fact, even though more effective, on the other hand wouldn't guarantee the privacy necessary for the secrecy of mafia activities.

ibid., p. 17.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 19.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 35.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 45 . My italics.

known rules of the Cosa Nostra), the Prosecutor considered Giuseppina Sansone's behaviour a contribution to the criminal organisation rather than full membership. It seems to me that Giuseppina's behaviour and tasks must be included within the first type of criminal behaviour, rather than the second. Moreover, as we noted earlier, if we compare her sentence with that of her son's, the differential treatment appears more evident. Mother and son's duties within the criminal association were more or less the same; however, her son Pietro was charged with mafia membership while Giuseppina was only charged with contribution to the association. By charging Pietro Tagliavia with 416bis (mafia association), the prosecutor explained:

(...) si deve ritenere elemento sufficiente a dimostrare l'appartenenza alla organizzazione mafiosa il costante collegamento ed i continui rapporti - in termini di "messa a disposizione" - con alcuni dei suoi esponenti di vertice, specie se si tratta di persone in stato di latitanza. E' infatti ben noto, e riconosciuto in molte pronunce giurisprudenziali, che uno dei tratti connaturati alla struttura di Cosa Nostra è la capacità di fornire assistenza ai suoi appartenenti, anche nei periodi di latitanza, non solo garantendo il protrarsi di essa per lunghi periodi (anche per molti anni), ma soprattutto facendo sì che anche in tali periodi i singoli uomini d'onore ed, ancor più, i capi dell'organizzazione mantengano i contatti con gli altri associati, conservino il controllo del territorio e continuino - in sostanza - a porre in essere quelle condotte e a commettere quei delitti che costituiscono la "normale" attività dell'associazione.

Una conferma ulteriore della tesi fin qui esposta scaturisce infine dalla recente sentenza della corte di Cassazione (n.2348 del 18.05.1994) la quale ha affermato che è possibile perseguire per il reato di associazione a delinquere di stampo mafioso chiunque, pur non essendo "organicamente interno alla medesima, (...) abbia realizzato una condotta costituente contributo ovvero apporto obbiettivamente idoneo alla conservazione od al rafforzamento della struttura associativa"

E non vi può essere dubbio che un "contributo" di tal genere sia costituito anche da attività quali -(...)- la partecipazione a gravissimi delitti, la tutela di latitanti o il mantenimento di contatti con questi, la trasmissione di messaggi tra uomini d'onore liberi o tra il carcere e l'esterno, la comunicazione di notizie riservate o, comunque, non di pubblico dominio, l'occultamento di prove a carico di esponenti dell'associazione mafiosa, etc..'⁵⁶

⁵⁶We have to consider that the constant link and relationships -in terms of availability- with bosses, particularly if they are on the run, is a sufficient element to prove membership in the mafia organisation. It is well known, as recognised by many rulings, that one of the features of the Cosa Nostra structure is the ability to give help to its members, even during periods at large, not only by guaranteeing the endurance of the period underground (even for many years), but above all by permitting each man of honour, and more importantly the heads of the organisation, to maintain contacts in those periods with other members, to maintain control over the territory, and finally to carry out those offences that constitute the 'normal' activity of the association. Confirmation of this thesis comes from a recent ruling by the Court of Cassation (n.2348 dated 18.05.1994), which stated that it is possible to charge with mafia association all those who, 'even if not organically included in that mafia association, (...) contributed to the maintenance and enhancement of the structure.' And there is no doubt that such a contribution includes (...) the participation in serious offences, helping people at large or keeping in touch with them, carrying messages between free men of honour or prison and the outside, communication of secret

It seems clear that Giuseppina Sansone was as involved as her son in the activities described above, yet they received different treatment from the justice system.

Documents regarding Giuseppina Vitale, whose role was described in the previous chapter, demonstrated that, although investigators recognised the female presence in the mafia, they had difficulty defining it.⁵⁷ In describing Vitale's *mandamento*, Public Prosecutor Alfredo Montalto observed that the investigative undertaking confirmed Buscetta's theory, in which the Cosa Nostra was divided into *mandamenti* with a hierarchical structure. At the same time, new factors emerged from the investigation, including the unexpected presence of women. According to Montalto, the investigation enabled him to:

isolare significativi elementi di novità, sintomo inequivocabile della straordinaria capacità di Cosa Nostra di adeguamento alle evenienze del momento, pur nel rispetto formale delle regole che presiedono alla sua organizzazione. Quello che subito emerge, infatti, da una rapida lettura dei risultati investigativi è il ruolo che all'interno dell'organizzazione hanno da ultimo assunto, in un momento di particolare difficoltà del sodalizio (o meglio di una parte, quella corleonese, dello stesso) soggetti per così dire atipici. (...) Quello che, in realtà, appare assolutamente atipico e, apparentemente, fuori dalle regole è la funzione di primaria assoluta importanza assunta da un soggetto di sesso femminile, Giuseppa VITALE, in seno all'organizzazione criminale. Infatti l'indagine ha chiaramente fatto emergere che la VITALE non si è limitata a svolgere i ruoli tradizionalmente assegnati alle "donne di Cosa Nostra" (favoreggiamento ed assistenza di latitanti, trasmissione di bigliettini sigillati dal carcere all'esterno, supporto secondario in qualche operazione criminosa, etc.) ma risulta, come si vedrà meglio appresso, avere addirittura, personalmente partecipato - e con significativa influenza - ad alcuni processi decisionali di fondamentale importanza per la sopravvivenza dell'associazione.⁵⁸

information, or anyway not publicly known, or hiding of evidence by members of the mafia association, etc. Tribunale di Palermo, Ufficio del Giudice per le indagini preliminari, Ordinanza di custodia cautelare in carcere n.3142/97 R.G.I.P del 30-06-97.

⁵⁷The arrest of Leonardo Vitale occurred in April 1998, Interview with Dott. Guido Marino, chief of the Palermo criminal mobile squad, 8 September 1998.

⁵⁸Isolate significant new elements, which were indisputable signs of Cosa Nostra's extraordinary capacity to adapt to the needs of the moment, while still formally respecting the rules regulating its organisation. What immediately emerges from a quick reading of the investigative findings, in fact, is the role that atypical subjects have recently assumed within the organisation in a moment of particular difficulty for the association (or rather of one part, namely the Corleonese). (...) What in reality appears totally atypical, apparently outside the rules, is the absolutely primary function assumed by a female subject, namely Giuseppa Vitale, within the criminal organisation. In fact, the criminal investigation made clear that Vitale did not only play roles traditionally entrusted to "the women of Cosa Nostra" (helping fugitives from justice, carrying notes from prison, secondary support in some criminal operations, etc.), but had also even personally participated in – and had an important influence over – several decision-making processes, which had a fundamental importance for the survival of the

Prosecutors felt the new aspect had to do with the mafiosi's violation of a rule in the mafia code.

(...) il coinvolgimento all'interno del sodalizio di un soggetto chiaramente atipico, quel è la Giuseppa VITALE - e, dunque, la sostanziale violazione delle regole di segretezza che impongono agli uomini d'onore di non rivelare a soggetti non formalmente inseriti (e, in questo caso, addirittura non inseribili) in Cosa Nostra notizie comunque inerenti l'associazione - si spiega quasi paradossalmente, ma, in realtà, agevolmente, con preminenti ragioni di autotutela del *consortium sceleris*. (...) ⁵⁹

By showing surprise at female involvement, prosecutors appeared to be influenced by the formal mafia rule excluding female participation. This analysis, however, did not prevent judges from charging Giusy Vitale with 416bis, thereby showing that the criminal justice system could adapt to the 'new' aspects of the Cosa Nostra, namely female participation.

Once again, women's involvement in the mafia was understood only as a new phenomenon due to a period of crisis within the organisation (*fibrillazione*) and not as a result of the increase in women's visibility. This thesis maintains that female participation was true even during peaceful times; although women entering the mafia was not a new circumstance, it grew and was more visible during difficult times due to men's absence. ⁶⁰

It is interesting to quote Sicilian writer Andrea Camilleri, who is an expert on Sicilian culture, at this point. His phrase was used in Giusy Vitale's trial documents in order to explain the involvement of women in the mafia. Judges quoted the following Camilleri sentence: 'Cosa Nostra has the shape of water, since water assumes the shape of the container in which it is poured: the wider the container, the more it spreads by occupying the newly added space.'⁶¹In other words, according to judges, the entry of women into the mafia could be understood as a new shape for the mafia while adapting to modernity. Camilleri responded as follows:

I must contest the use (of my phrase); I do not think that it is a mutation, a change in the shape of water. There is nothing new in wives, sons, sisters and lovers assuming the roles of bosses. This shape is already known. I would exclude women not knowing what mafiosi do. Women have always been within the mafia world; they

organisation Tribunale di Palermo, Sezione del Giudice per le Indagini Preliminari, Ordinanza di custodia cautelare in carcere n.2392/98 R.G.G.I.P.

⁵⁹The involvement in the association of a clearly atypical subject such as Giuseppa Vitale, and therefore the essential violation of the secret rule which forbid men of honour to reveal information regarding men of honour to subjects not formally included (and in this case that cannot even be included) might be explained rather paradoxically, but in reality, easily, through prevailing reasons of self-defence of the *consortium sceleris*. *ibid.*

⁶⁰*ibid.*

⁶¹*ibid.*

occupied the traditional role of women in Sicily, they stayed inside the home. And they talked with their husbands, listened, understood. They have only now-been compelled to come outside. There is no mutation here; women are exactly like men.⁶²

In other words, according to Camilleri nothing has changed. On the contrary, as this thesis demonstrates, the mafia has adapted to modernity, and showed it was more ready than in the past to give women positions of leadership especially when their men were in prison. However, on the other hand the shock of investigators was exaggerated on finding women with active roles in the mafia.

The treatment of defendants Giusy Vitale and Giuseppina Sansone marked a turning point in the criminal justice system's attitude. These women, in fact, were not charged with mere aiding and abetting (*favoreggiamento*), as they would have been in the past. Yet, previous attitudes did persist as is shown by the evident surprise involved in defining women as 'atypical subjects.' More recent trial documents demonstrated that nowadays the presence of women in the mafia is no longer considered unusual. In the cases of Nunzia Graviano, Cinzia Lipari, and Gisella Greco, prosecutors did not underline the novelty of the phenomenon and also did not justify female involvement solely with the crisis in the criminal organisation.

The last step toward equal treatment between men and women within the criminal justice system was the application of so-called *carcere duro* (harsh incarceration or 'hard time') to a woman. As already explained in chapter two, the state reacted to the mafia attack against public officials in 1992 with severe countermeasures, including Article 41bis of the penal code. The first female case of 41bis was that of Maria Filippa Messina. Judges decided to apply it to her because she was discovered communicating with mafia fellows while she was in prison. On the basis of this ability to maintain criminal relationships with the mafia clan outside prison, she was considered dangerous and therefore isolated.⁶³ Maria Filippa sent a letter to *La Sicilia*, a Sicilian newspaper, complaining that her treatment was inhumane considering she had a child.⁶⁴ Even her lawyer, Caterina Calia denounced Maria Filippa's precarious health.⁶⁵ This story tells us that judges made the decision based on the real risk that the defendant could maintain contacts with her fellows outside rather than on

⁶²*La Sicilia*, 28 giugno 1998.

⁶³Principato, Dino, *Mafia donna*, p. 70. Interview with Public Prosecutor, Flavia Panzano, Catania, 11 September 2003. Three women out of 645 men were under 41bis in 2002, Research carried out by Radicali, *Giornale di Sicilia*, 7 Dicembre 2002.

⁶⁴*il Venerdì della Repubblica*, 25 November 1997.

⁶⁵*La Stampa*, 22 Febbraio 1999.

the basis of any potential social reaction. Given the fact that societal gender expectations had changed, society was ready to accept that a woman could be a criminal. As a consequence, the criminal justice system worried less about social reaction than in the past. Also, times were mature enough in society that such a decision could finally be accepted.

6. 3. *Towards a balanced perspective*

Just as women in history have been traditionally presented in dualistic terms, mafia women have been described through dichotomous pictures to the detriment of the plurality of women's experiences. As this thesis has underlined many times, until recently society underestimated the function of women within the mafia, considering it passive. However, the subsequent discovery of a female presence behind the traditional role, in my view, led to attributing exaggerated importance to the functions and responsibilities of women in the mafia.⁶⁶ Even current common opinion tends to believe it is really women who run everything behind the scenes in the mafia, including family and business. As suggested in this thesis, this is the latest of many stereotypical images and it needs to be contained by employing a balanced perspective, achievable through a feminist approach.

A pivotal contribution to eliminating the traditional passive image of women in the mafia came from the fact that women have been studying the mafia from a gender perspective, and that there have been women who turned state's witness. If women listening to women's words were able to question the picture filtered by men by demonstrating that women were not merely passive, they also might help prevent the analysis shifting to an opposite understanding which neglects those patriarchal elements that mark the fabric of the mafia. A new distorted representation, this time negative, would be risky, because, as observed above, social reactions influence the criminal processing system. Giovanni Fiandaca's following reflection, although paradoxical, is an example of this new risky direction:

An indictment of external participation would have been, at most, attributable towards those women-brides-wives who, until a recent past, would have been limited to a role of caretakers and reproducers of mafia cultural codes. (...) In strict criminal terms, we might, in fact, also think in the following way: the function the woman plays as 'reproducer' within the mafia family of mafia cultural codes, to the extent it is an activity that objectively contributes to the perpetuation of the mafia

⁶⁶See work by Longrigg, and Principato-Dino.

association, might take on penal relevance in terms of participation or (at least) of external contribution.⁶⁷

In the case of women belonging to a mafia family, the relation between moral responsibility and penal liability varied and was sometimes blurred. As explained below, it is obvious that a penal condemnation always entails the moral one, unlike the opposite. This is because the mafia, as we know from the previous chapters, involves not only criminal but also cultural aspects. The latter are pivotal, insofar as they have permitted the mafia to survive over time, in spite of penal charges. From this, it should be clear why there have been many cases of mafia women who, because they were involved in the cultural structure of the mafia system, behave in a way that might be considered chargeable from a moral point of view yet not from a criminal one. Thus, two levels must be defined: the criminal and the ethical.

On a penal level, criminal liability must be assessed for single cases by considering specific behaviour, and avoiding general social considerations. A recent (1999) ruling of the Court of Cassation seemed to take this stance, as its juridical statement said: 'a cliché regarding the mafia has collapsed: the role of women is not always passive'.⁶⁸ Maria Rosa Mammoliti, Maria Caterina Nava and Clara Rugolo, all charged with mafia association, were acquitted in the first and second degrees of the trial. Later, the *Corte di Assise di Appello* in Reggio Calabria modified the verdict by motivating the decision on the ground that considering a mafia woman as a mere passive wife was an anachronistic assumption:

Riguardo alla condotta associativa, i giudici di merito avevano affermato che nel particolare contesto sociale il ruolo della donna, oggetto di una strategia di alleanze tramite matrimoni volti a rafforzare i 'clan' mafiosi, si risolveva in una passiva acquiescenza alle scelte del coniuge e che mancava in concreto la prova di una qualsiasi iniziativa o apporto decisionale riconducibile alle imputate, al di là della mera funzione di rappresentanza degli interessi familiari. Il preteso dato di costume era stato recepito sul piano sociologico e su quello storico, utilizzato nel processo senza alcuna considerazione sulla sua valenza probatoria e trasferito nelle vicende del 'clan' senza approfondimento in ordine al livello culturale ed ai concreti comportamenti dei componenti; si era attribuito valore determinante all'assenza di partecipazione alla fase decisionale, senza considerare che il vincolo associativo è essenzialmente caratterizzato come contributo all'attuazione del programma, sicché significativi dovevano considerarsi gli apporti recati nelle modalità preparatorie ed esecutive delle estorsioni. Ne seguiva la necessità di un nuovo esame che tenesse conto della stretta collaborazione delle imputate, nel corso degli anni, con i rispettivi mariti, anche indipendentemente da comportamenti particolari nell'ambito dei reati-fine. (...) Quanto alle tre donne, a prescindere dalla valutazione

⁶⁷*La Stampa*, 20 Dicembre 1996.

⁶⁸Corte di cassazione – Sezione I penale, Sentenza n. 10953, - (26 Maggio-25 Settembre 1999)

sociologica del loro ruolo, che nella realtà contemporanea, non può essere ricondotto a quello di semplice strumento delle scelte di vita del coniuge, e valutati in concreto i comportamenti posti in essere era emerso che...(...) Tali concreti contributi al conseguimento degli scopi associativi, posti in essere anche per vantaggio personale, evidenziato dal lussuoso tenore di vita, esulavano da una funzione di mera e passiva rappresentanza attraverso l'intestazione di immobili e quote societarie e si traducevano in fattiva ed operosa cooperazione nell'ambito di un ruolo assegnato bensì dai vertici del gruppo familiare, ma consapevolmente ed autonomamente accettato.⁶⁹

Finally, the Court concluded with a 'revolutionary' statement: 'The participation of women in the mafia association cannot be presumed from an asserted norm from an experience taken from facts regarding sociology and customs, according to which she employs a passive and instrumental role, yet it must be reconstructed through the examination of the concrete and peculiar characteristics of the event which constitutes the object of the trial.'⁷⁰

Even on the moral level, a given form of behaviour must be gauged by considering the single individual case. However, society tends to justify some behaviour that clearly defends mafia ideology, merely because it is employed by a woman who is also a mother. This was the case with Ninetta Bagarella (Toto Riina's wife), to whom Italian society showed some indulgence, both in the early 1970s when she declared she was just a woman in love, and again in the early 1990s when she sent a letter to defend her son Giovanni who had been charged with mafia association.⁷¹ Most of Italian society was on Ninetta's side by insisting that defending her son was a mother's right, even if he was a mafioso. Among the few negative reactions to Ninetta's letter was that from the mother of Emanuela Loi, the

⁶⁹In relation to the association's behaviour, the judges (*giudici di merito*) had affirmed that, in this particular social context, the role of women as objects of strategic alliance through marriages aimed at reinforcing mafia clans, was limited to a passive acquiescence to their husbands' choices and that there was a lack of concrete proof of the defendants' initiative or decision-making contribution beyond the mere function of representing family interests. The supposed element of custom was considered on a sociological and historical level, utilised in the trial without any consideration of its probative value and transferred to the clan's facts/events without dwelling on the cultural level and concrete behaviour of its members; great consideration was given to the absence of participation in the decision-making phase, without considering that the associative bond is essentially characterised as contribution to the realization of the plan so that the contribution to the preparation and execution of extortions must be considered significant. As a consequence, the necessity of another exam occurred, which would take into consideration the close collaboration between the defendants and their husbands over the years, even independent from particular behaviour within the area of crimes-aims. (...) In regards to the three women (we must go) beyond the sociological analysis of their role, which cannot be reduced to that of mere instruments of their husband's life choices, but (we have to evaluate) the concrete behaviourThe concrete contributions to achieving the aims of the association, also carried out for personal advantages, indicated by the luxurious lifestyle, were beyond a mere and passive function of representation through using their names on real-estate deeds and company stock... but they corresponded with a factual and industrious cooperation within the sphere of a role given by the heads of the family group, but consciously and autonomously accepted. *ibid.*

⁷⁰*ibid.*

⁷¹*La Repubblica*, 23-6-1996.

policewoman who was killed by the mafia bomb, which murdered Prosecutor Paolo Borsellino.

Does your heart break for your sons? Do you want to protect them because they are blood of your blood? Did you think of the others? Did you think of the grief and tears of those mothers that lost their sons; did you think of the grief and tears of those mothers who everyday wonder why their relatives disappeared, murdered by your criminal of a husband?.⁷²

Finally, a balanced approach is necessary in dealing with mafia women as a subject of study, since the participation of women in the mafia is an ambiguous and contradictory reality. Women are aware of their men's activities in which they are deeply involved; however, their involvement might not imply they are subject to any criminal charge. Furthermore, female experience in the mafia often entails gender segregation and male dominance.

In order to combine all these aspects, more knowledge must be collected about women through oral sources and by meeting with women and men and documenting their different stories. The next chapter will turn to this task by considering direct and indirect accounts of people who turned state's evidence. This is related to one purpose of this thesis, namely to explore the intersections between biography and history within society.

⁷²*La Repubblica* 25-6-1996.

STATISTICAL APPENDIX¹

Criminal statistics are misleading in reconstructing the history of crime.² Making comparisons between criminal trends over time presents numerous risks, because the definition of deviance changes throughout time.³ This is one of the explanations for the fluctuations reported in table 1: changes in numbers of indicted and convicted women might stem from the fact that behaviour which was liable in the past may not be liable nowadays, and vice versa. As Mike Maguire observed, 'The law, of course, changes over time, new offences being created and others being refined or decriminalized, so that, even if we had god-like vision to spot every possible transgression, it would be difficult to make comparative statements about the 'level of crime' over a period of years (...).'⁴

In reading criminal statistics it has also to be considered that during the criminal procedure -from arresting to sentencing- the initial accusation might shift from one category of offence to another one. For instance, it is likely that women arrested for mafia crime end up being sentenced with abetting.

The case of mafia association (table 3) gives us an illuminating example of the difficulties in reconstructing the history of a single category of crime. As we know, the crime of mafia association was introduced in the Italian penal code in 1982 and started to appear in criminal statistics in 1987. As a result we cannot trace its historical trend before 1987. That is why it is also important to report data concerning the offence *associazione per delinquere* -criminal association (table 2). Even the crime of money laundering (table 4) in its new formulation (*riciclaggio*)⁵ started to appear in criminal statistics in the 1990s. Statistical records of this offence concern us because, as seen in chapter five, qualitative

¹ Sources: annual judiciary statistics published by ISTAT and statistical tablets in AA.VV., *Donne e mafie*, pp. 118-120.

Data are reported until 2002, because official data of 2003 and 2004 has not been published at the time of writing.

² The use of criminal statistics in reconstructing the history of crime has been amply debated, Clive Emsley, 'The History of Crime and Crime Control Institutions', in Maguire, Morgan, Reiner, *The Oxford Handbook*, p. 59.

³ Mike Maguire, 'Crime Statistics, Patterns, and Trends', in *ibid*, p. 159.

⁴ Mike Maguire, 'Crime Statistics, Patterns, and Trends', in *ibid.*, 141.

⁵ For this crime see Gherardo Colombo, *Il riciclaggio*, Giuffrè Editore, Milano, 1990. The crime of money laundering (art. 648-bis) appeared in the Italian penal code in 1978 with the following formulation: '*Sostituzione di denaro o valori provenienti da rapina aggravate, estorsione aggravate o sequestro di persona a scopo di estorsione*'. For a subtle juridical question (well explained by Colombo, pp. 80-81) it was quite difficult to sentence people with this charge. Therefore in 1990 art.648 bis was reformulated as *riciclaggio*. This new formulation allows better to accuse those criminal behaviours linked to launder money coming from mafia illicit business. (Colombo, p. 83).

data show that finance is increasingly becoming one of the main fields of women's involvement in the mafia.

To have an idea of the statistical incidence of female involvement in mafia crime within the overall picture of female crime this statistical appendix also reports data concerning female criminality in relation to male rates in terms of arrests and charges. Such an approach, namely calculating the percentage of women committing crimes, is not a valid method to read trends in female involvement in mafia crime. The number of women is so low that assessing the ratio between male and female participation might be misleading. In fact, as the combination of statistical and social data tells us, changes in percentage might not indicate significant transformations, and vice versa. Therefore it might be better to read data on female mafia involvement in absolute terms rather than in relation to male rates. On a superficial level statistics indicate that the growth of women reported and sentenced with mafia crime has been moderate. There is no doubt that officially, female crime and female criminal involvement in the mafia has not increased as much as the media has recently tended to portray. On the basis of official data reported here the mafia remains a man's world in terms of criminal structure. However, criminal data mirror a tiny part of reality, since they do not include those offenders who were not discovered, and obviously they do not register those kinds of involvement in the mafia which are not criminally chargeable, such as the traditional role analysed in chapter four.

That said, there is no doubt that regardless of the soundness of numbers statistical data are able to show us a certain fact: trends of female involvement in mafia crime is subject to fluctuation (see tables 2 and 3). This means that the number of women entering the mafia labour market has not been constant thus confirming what we demonstrated throughout this thesis, namely that women were used as a reserve force within mafia criminal activities.

1. ALL CRIME CATEGORIES

1.2.1 INDICTED PEOPLE

YEAR	TOTAL	WOMEN	PERCENT WOMEN
1970	499,972	NA	NA
1980	508,116	NA	NA
1990	348,127	53,982	15.5%
1991	506,280	84,911	16.7%
1992	561,230	96,304	17.1%
1993	550,354	88,816	16.1%
1994	601,369	101,977	16.9%
1995	565,366	93,577	16.5%
1996	546,591	91,768	16.8%
1997	556,911	93,113	16.7%
1998	523,773	83,167	15.8%
1999	524,551	79,151	15%
2000	340,234	46,116	13.5%
2001	513,112	74,269	14.4%
2002	541,413	76,504	14.1%

1.2 CONVICTED PEOPLE

YEAR	TOTAL	WOMEN	PERCENT WOMEN
1970	65,295	10,697	16.3%
1980	134,344	18,253	13.5%
1990	118,116	14,868	12.5%
1991	158,264	19,264	12.1%
1992	177,362	25,550	14.4%
1993	193,275	30,036	15.5%
1994	206,631	33,418	16.1%
1995	204,481	29,326	14.3%
1996	245,422	41,056	16.7%
1997	292,980	49,996	17 %
1998	302,666	51,404	16.9%
1999	278,660	45,861	16.4%
2000	308,300	56,849	18.4%
2001	239,174	34,366	14.3%
2002	221,190	31,880	14.4%

2. CRIMINAL ASSOCIATION

2.1 INDICTED PEOPLE

YEAR	TOTAL	WOMEN	PERCENT WOMEN
1970	1,004	NA	NA
1980	1,790	NA	NA
1985	2,129	106	4.9%
1986	2,574	146	5.6%
1987	2,732	NA	
1988	2,346	191	8.1%
1989	2,158	192	4,6%
1990	1,117	142	12.7%
1991	1,981	203	10.2%
1992	2,181	243	11.1%
1993	2,931	361	12.3%
1994	5,621	1,024	18.2%
1995	3,591	498	13.9%
1996	3,677	486	13.2%
1997	4,105	603	14.7%
1998	2,664	357	15.8%
1999	2,962	543	18.3%
2000	1,305	155	11.9%
2001	3,318	532	16%
2002	4,702	627	13,3%

2.2. CONVICTED PEOPLE

YEAR	TOTAL	WOMEN	PERCENT WOMEN
1970	23	0	-
1980	97	3	3%
1981	116	6	5.1%
1982	163	9	5.5%
1983	272	17	6,2%
1984	173	7	4%
1985	135	2	1.4%
1986	240	8	3.3%
1987	206	3	1.4%
1988	211	7	3.3%
1989	217	17	7,8%
1990	230	7	3%
1991	459	26	5.6%
1992	496	29	5.8%
1993	447	44	9.8%
1994	663	60	9%
1995	633	61	9.6%
1996	820	86	10.4%
1997	922	93	10%
1998	881	98	11.1%
1999	699	70	10%
2000	636	80	12.5%
2001	635	90	14.1%
2002	576	62	10,7%

3. MAFIA CRIME

3.1. INDICTED PEOPLE

YEAR	TOTAL	WOMEN	PERCENT WOMEN
1988	239	9	3.7%
1989	547	24	4.3%
1990	84	1	1.1%
1991	133	1	0.75%
1992	225	10	4.4%
1993	241	9	3.7%
1994	16	1	6.2%
1995	266	8	3%
1996	180	6	3.3%
1997	440	18	4%
1998	300	7	2.3%
1999	329	9	2.7%
2000	270	16	5.9%
2001	277	20	7.2%
2002	321	3	0,9%

3.2. CONVICTED PEOPLE

YEAR	TOTAL	WOMEN	PERCENT WOMEN
1987	8	0	-
1988	24	2	8.3%
1989	4	0	-
1990	21	0	-
1991	28	2	7.1%
1992	49	0	-
1993	20	0	-
1994	41	0	-
1995	131	3	2.2%
1996	207	4	1.9%
1997	308	8	2.5%
1998	272	2	0.7%
1999	280	3	1%
2000	452	5	1.1%
2001	2	0	-
2002	573	9	1,5%

4. MONEY LAUNDERING

4.1. INDICTED PEOPLE

YEAR	TOTAL	WOMEN	PERCENT WOMEN
1995	421	28	6.6%
1996	642	51	7.9%
1997	763	58	7.6%
1998	1,338	81	6%
1999	1,262	71	5.6%
2000	1,389	89	6.4%
2001	3,244	228	7%

4.2. CONVICTED PEOPLE

YEAR	TOTAL	WOMEN	PERCENT WOMEN
1995	13	1	7.6%
1996	67	7	10.4%
1997	102	7	6.8%
1998	152	12	7.8%
1999	178	9	5%
2000	227	11	4.8%
2001	358	25	6.9%

CHAPTER SEVEN

Women and Pentitismo

Introduction

This chapter will focus on *pentitismo* (turning state's evidence) from a gender perspective. First, attention will be drawn to the mothers, sisters and wives of mafiosi who decided to turn state's evidence. This will be done by concentrating on the women's reactions to men's decisions. Female reactions range from solidarity to hostility. Secondly, this chapter will look at women who became *pentite* by analysing the motivations pushing them to turn state's evidence, namely vendetta or rejection of mafia principles. Finally, the chapter will deal with the story of Rita Di Giovine, who belonged to a 'Ndrangheta family until 1993 when she decided to 'repent' (*pentire*).

Though it is not possible here to enter into a detailed discussion of the *pentiti* law provided by the Italian penal code, a certain amount of information is necessary. As mentioned in chapter two, the law was passed in 1991, as a result of the need to protect mafiosi who gave their testimonies to investigators, thus enabling the latter to carry out criminal investigations against mafia associations. The crime of mafia membership is, by definition, committed by a group of people (minimum three), and therefore the testimony of one of the members is valuable in order to discover the secrets of the consortium. The use of *pentiti* has been a controversial issue at the political and popular levels. In Italy, there has been a tendency to believe that judges use *pentiti* testimonies as the only evidence in trials. On the contrary, these testimonies are always corroborated by other oral sources or 'written' evidence such as intercepted telephone calls, bank documents, etc. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to justify the validity of a *pentito*'s testimony as trial evidence. Suffice it to say that contributions made by informers have been recognised since the beginning of the 20th century, as demonstrated in the following ruling from 1901. 'On the subject of membership in a criminal organisation, which must necessarily be started and operated in secret, no other demonstration is possible than that from those who already

participate in the *mala vita* (criminal life) and who are therefore able to know all its secrets.’¹

Investigators have always used secret informants; however, in the late 1980s, the necessity arose to regulate the use of people talking to the state. The turning point of the regulation of *pentitismo* was the 1991 law, which stemmed from the implementation of the witness program designed by the Italian state to combat terrorism in the late 1970s. At that time, the state offered imprisoned terrorists the opportunity to dissociate themselves from subversive organisations. Given the good results of that procedure, it was also applied to the crime of mafia association thus enabling judges to know more about the workings of the mafia. In this regard, the testimony of Tommaso Buscetta given to judge Giovanni Falcone in 1984 was exemplary.

Under Law 82/91, the State offered mafia defectors reductions in punishment and protection from mafia revenge in exchange for their testimonies.² Thus, the law encouraged many mafiosi to leave the mafia and start a new life under state protection.³ Public Prosecutor Maurizio Romanelli, who had long experience in convincing mafiosi to turn state’s evidence, observed: ‘It was a tiny law, made up of only ten articles, however it had a positive effect on the battle against organised crime.’⁴

Because of the numerous defections brought about by this law, the mafia was in trouble in the early 1990s, so much so that mafia experts considered the application of this law to be one of the reasons sparking the bloody mafia attack against public officials. Along with other State countermeasures and the antimafia movement in civil society, this law definitely led to the decline of the mafia in the early 1990s.

The state witness program was managed by *Commissione ex-art.10* and the *Servizio Centrale di Protezione*.⁵ The first body (made up of politicians, judges and policemen) was in charge of deciding the admission of a given *pentito* to the witness program, as requested

¹Sentenza 2/08/1901, processo contro Aricò Antonio + 56, Corte di Appello delle Calabrie, quoted in Maurizio Romanelli, *I collaboratori di giustizia*, p. 361.

²The South Africa Truth and Reconciliation Commission drawn inspiration from Italian witness program in order to organise the protection of those people who spoke out, Priscilla B. Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths. Facing the Challenge of Truth Commission*, Routledge, London, 2002, p. 246.

³For a explanation of the development of this law, Silvio D’Amico, *Il collaboratore della giustizia*, Edizioni Laurus Robuffo, Roma, 1995, p. 13.

⁴Romanelli, *I collaboratori di giustizia*, p. 361.

⁵*ibid.*, p. 363.

by Prosecutors. Once the *pentito* was included in the program, the *Servizio Centrale* dealt with the practical aspects of managing his/her life, including protection and assistance.

The term *collaboratori di giustizia*⁶ (literally ‘collaborators with justice’) refers both to *pentiti* (literally ‘someone who repents’) and to *testimoni* (‘witnesses’); the first are those who confess all their criminal involvement and give investigators information about criminal events and people; *testimoni* on the other hand have committed no crime but were witnesses to a crime or demonstrated knowledge about a crime.⁷

Whether or not to include a *collaboratore di giustizia* within the witness program depends on two factors. First, the extent of the relevance of the *pentito*’s account and his/her reliability must be considered; second, the extent to which the person is in danger.⁸ Along with their family, people who become state witnesses run the risk of being murdered by the mafia organisation, because the vendetta is a basic mafia principle both in practical and symbolic terms. As demonstrated in chapter four, punishment of traitors not only cleanses the offended honour, but is also a good deterrent for other members.

The state witness protection program embraces protection measures (*misure di protezione*), which consist in moving *pentiti* to another place of residence, providing them with false documents (*documenti di copertura*), and, in the most dangerous cases, a change of identity (*cambio delle generalità*), i.e. the creation of new personal data. Moreover, the program includes assistance measures (*misure di assistenza*) involving economic support, which varies according to the numbers of relatives considered to be in danger, and prison benefits, which often result in alternative measures to prison (*misure alternative al carcere*), including house arrest.⁹

Coming out of an emergency, namely the growth of defections due to the state’s harsh reaction to the mafia, the 1991 law contained some imperfections and was therefore reformed in 2001. A detailed description of the changes would take us far away from the scope of this chapter; suffice it to say that some experts, including Public Prosecutor Maurizio Romanelli and lawyer Federico Stellari, think that the modification will have the effect of discouraging people from turning state’s evidence.¹⁰ This will have a devastating impact on the struggle against the mafia. Instead, *Maggiore* Gianni Saraceno, a member of

⁶art.1 ter of law L.726/1982, introduced by law 486/1988 and art.9 of law L.82/1991.

⁷art. 3 of law L. 304/1982. D’Amico, *Il collaboratore di giustizia*, pp. 18-19.

⁸Romanelli, *I collaboratori di giustizia*, p. 363.

⁹*ibid.*, p. 363.

¹⁰For a detailed description of the reform see *ibid.*, p. 363. Interview with lawyer Federico Stellari, Milan, 4 March 2004.

the *Commissione Centrale*, provided me with data that apparently indicates that the number of people deciding to collaborate with the State has not recently decreased.¹¹ In my view, any analysis of the direct effects of this reform is premature.

7. 1. *Women relatives of pentiti: between solidarity and hostility*

Generally speaking, the success of the judicial collaboration of a *pentito* depends greatly upon the attitude of his wife toward the decision he has taken. Judges who have dealt with *pentiti* agree on the fact that the support of women for men talking with judges is fundamental, as Giovanni Falcone and Antonio Manganelli immediately understood at a time when the witness program did not exist.

When men were on the run, they often trusted their woman to communicate their decision to investigators. If men were in prison, as in the case of Vittorio Foschini mentioned in chapter two, they usually asked prosecutors to talk with their wives, because the woman's opinion was pivotal in this decision.¹²

There is no doubt that a delicate moment like collaboration unmasked key aspects of gender dynamics within a mafia family. According to Alessandra Dino and Teresa Principato, the important role played by women in male collaboration was a sign of powerful female influence on their men, even if publicly they seemed completely subservient.¹³ In my view, the trust that men showed towards women was more evidence to confirm the fact that mafiosi used women when they needed to. A mafioso who eventually decided to turn state's witness was a hunted and powerless man. As such, he could find support only from his wife.

Data reported by the *Commissione Centrale* since 1997 shows that the number of male *pentiti* has outnumbered female ones and consequently there were more women than men in the section called 'relatives of *pentiti*'.¹⁴ In 1998, a section of the report from the *Commissione centrale* was devoted to the supporting role women played when their men turned state's evidence. It emphasised that a good relation between the protected person (*pentito*) and protector (*Servizio Centrale di Protezione*) was needed in order to make the witness program work. This relation improved when the wife of the *pentito* helped her husband both practically and psychologically in daily life. The woman became the

¹¹Interview with Maggiore Gianni Saraceno, Rome, 12 January 2004.

¹²Interview with Vittorio Foschini, Modena, 4 May 2004.

¹³Principato, Dino, *Mafia donna*, p. 19.

¹⁴Interview with Maggiore Gianni Saraceno, Rome, 12 January 2004.

mainstay of the family, because the man was often absent due to his commitments at trial hearings where he gave his testimony, or because he was in prison. She also assumed the key function of reconstructing the social role and new identity of the *pentito* after the shock of collaboration. In the view of the mafia, a *pentito* was considered not merely a betrayer but somebody who broke one of the most important rules of the mafia organisation, that is *omertà* (the law of silence). As this quality was considered an attribute of virility, talking with the enemy, namely the state, caused the man to lose an important feature of mafioso identity, which he would have kept if in prison or on the run. *Pentiti* confessed they considered *pentiti* as *infami* (infamous) when they were in the underworld. Vincenzo La Piana told me some mafiosi (his ex-fellows) he had accused insulted him during a hearing in Turin. He admitted to me that he understood their point of view:

Of course, in Turin they were all in that cage and they called me a bastard I don't know how many times, then "*infamune*" ("infamous, wicked, evil, etc.") but to be honest I say to myself 'Well, they are right to call me that... because I said the same to them when I saw Cancemi, "Look at this piece of shit."¹⁵

That is why becoming a *pentito* is not an easy decision, even if compelled by circumstances. La Piana confessed: 'It was easier to be a mafioso than a *pentito*.'¹⁶ Turning state's evidence meant abandoning one's own traditional identity; thus, it was much easier if this passage occurred with the support of women. If women supported the male role as father, which can substitute that of Mafioso, men experienced this transformation not as humiliation but an opportunity to change. On the contrary, if women did not support their men's decision and left them, it was hard for a *pentito* to find reasons for going on.

To give some idea of women playing a supportive role, we refer to two stories of famous *pentiti*, Nino Calderone and Tommaso Buscetta. They started to collaborate with justice in the mid-to-late 1980s, when the witness program did not yet exist. That is why their protection was improvised directly by Judge Giovanni Falcone and investigator Antonio Mangano. The more the state lacked organisation, the more women of *pentiti* were important in terms of mediation and logistical organisation.

Margherita Gangemi, wife of Nino Calderone, was an example of a woman who was able to create the perfect condition to face all the troubles one encountered when turning state's evidence.¹⁷ According to Giovanni Falcone, Margherita had discussed all the details

¹⁵Interview with Vincenzo La Piana, Bologna, 2 April 2004.

¹⁶*ibid.*

¹⁷For details on the story of Margherita Petralia, Longrigg, *Mafia Women*, pp. 184-187.

with him of her husband's collaboration with justice. Nino's brother, Pippo Calderone was shot dead in 1978, namely at the beginning of the second mafia war (mentioned in the second chapter).¹⁸ As a consequence, Calderone's family was in danger; thus, in 1983, Nino Calderone decided to leave Sicily with his wife and three children. They settled down in Nice where police captured Nino in 1986. After a while he decided to collaborate; he gave crucial information confirming the stories of two other important *pentiti*, Tommaso Buscetta and Totuccio Contorno, and helped reconstruct the development of the mafia in the area of Catania. Manganelli told Clare Longrigg that Margherita's life at the beginning of her husband's collaboration was tough, because there was no witness program at that time. Later on, the Italian Government was able to send them to the US where they rebuilt a new life. According to journalist Liliana Madeo, Margherita had a powerful role in transmitting a positive image of their father to their sons; she promoted the idea he was not an *infame*, but a man who was worthy because of his choice. Margherita was able to give him back his dignity by confirming his role of father and involving him in family decisions of everyday life such as the mortgage, schooling of the sons, etc., even if he was in prison.¹⁹ Eventually, Calderone's passage from being a mafia boss to being an ordinary man was quite smooth, because the strength of family love balanced the loss of the mafia identity that had characterised his life until the *pentimento*.

Similarly, the success of Tommaso Buscetta's turning state's evidence depended on his last wife, Cristina De Almeida Guimares. Buscetta was a mythical figure in the history of the mafia, first for his exciting criminal life and then his *pentimento*. In the 1950s, he became a member of one of the most important Cosa Nostra groups, the *Porta Nuova* Family, while he was still an adolescent. Most of his renown derived from his 'irregular' love life, which created so many problems within the mafia that they theoretically and temporarily expelled him. Aside from numerous lovers, the last of his three wives was Cristina whom he met in Brazil in the early 1970s. Cristina was accustomed to criminal environments as her father was a lawyer involved in the underworld. After a few years of living with Christina, Buscetta was captured by Brazilian police and extradited to Italy where he spent five years in a Palermo prison, *Ucciardone*, where he married her in 1978. In the early 1980s, during the second mafia war, the Buscetta family in Palermo was wiped

¹⁸For the historical context of the events concerning Pippo and Antonino Calderone see Saverio Lodato, *Venti anni di mafia*, Bur Rizzoli, Milano, 1999, p. 237, and Arlacchi, *Gli uomini del disonore*.

¹⁹Madeo, *Donne di mafia*, pp. 38-39.

out; therefore, he decided to talk to judge Giovanni Falcone. Thanks to his testimony, Falcone was able to set up the prosecution leading to the famous 'maxi-trial' of 1986. Antonio Manganelli explained to journalist Clare Longrigg the importance of Cristina's positive attitude in relation to Buscetta's *pentimento*:

Behind Buscetta, this charismatic personality, is a truly remarkable woman. She understood that collaboration was the only way; she begged him to do it. She is an extraordinary woman, undoubtedly much more cultured than most mafia wives... The way her mind works is clear, concrete and efficient –she goes straight for the solution to a problem. (...) She has done a lot for him. She adopted his children from another marriage; she took them to Brazil, gave them a new life, and brought up their own two children –very well, in my opinion... All the time he was in Brazil, and in Italy, she struggled on alone...When I met her she was holding together this extended family, and living exactly like any other American woman. She spoke perfect English, and was studying and working as an interpreter.²⁰

The stories of Margherita and Christina were described above according to the picture drawn by journalists Liliana Madeo and Clare Longrigg who interviewed people informed about the events. By relying on their sources, we could suggest some hypotheses. Longrigg and Madeo told us Margherita and Christina's difficult and painful stories from a romantic perspective. Yet what seems to lurk behind these events is a picture in which the women's identity was reduced to that of mothers and wives who sacrificed themselves in the name of love and family. This is not to judge personal interpretations of womanhood, however it is an indicator of the hypothesis informing this thesis in relation to female subordination to male needs within the mafia family. This, of course, might not be specific to mafia environment, however here it is particularly accentuated as already seen in chapters four and five.

These two stories are the most well known; however, evidence from the data in the reports by the *Commissione Centrale* indicates there are many similar stories. The great number of female relatives of *pentiti* protected by the state shows that, most of the time, *pentiti* were followed by their families.

Cases also exist of families who did not support the *pentito* and disowned him. A negative reaction might be caused by a web of factors, including fear of retaliation, economic problems or attachment to mafia principles. Whatever the reason, the result of refusing to accept the protection program and condemning their men's decision brought advantages to the criminal organisations, and particularly to their cultural structure.

²⁰Longrigg, *Mafia Women*, p. 182.

Women disagreeing with their men who decided to turn state's witnesses, firstly, tend to do as much as possible to convince them to withdraw their testimonies. One recent episode is that of Angela Morbillo who was able to convince her husband, Fedele Battaglia, to retract what he confessed.²¹

Economic reasons often pushed a woman to make her husband withdraw his confession. Financially, it was more convenient remaining in prison than collaborating with the State because the organisation paid a wage to the family of imprisoned mafia members.²² Moreover, the criminal organisation used money to convince the *pentito* to withdraw his testimony and entrusted the message to his wife: 'and so wives and family members frequently carried out, what we might call, the "unpleasant" task of criminal recovery of their own husbands, brothers, brother-in-law, and sons.'²³ Since the *vendetta trasversale* was a common practice in the mafia, as demonstrated by the extreme cases of Tommaso Buscetta and Marino Mannoia, repudiating the *pentito* became a sort of shelter to protect the family from revenge. When a woman sought to distance herself from her man due to fear, she often went back to her husband later when she got the opportunity to be included in the witness program. Some women stand against the decision of their men because this choice goes against the mafia mentality with which they have been brought up. In other words, the power of mafia culture was so deep that many women were ready to disown their male relatives. Boemi told Renate Siebert in relation to the 'Ndrangheta that, 'During the *pentitismo* phase, women in Calabria frequently maintained a critical attitude toward this choice to collaborate with the state; they frequently suffered because of it; they underwent this precisely because of their inability to change their system of life.'²⁴

During the 1990s, some women rejected their men publicly by calling for press conferences to state they would have nothing to do with their men's decision. Teresa Principato and Alessandra Dino saw this attitude as a new strategy of communication the mafia employed during difficult periods, such as the early-to-mid-1990s. When the mafia speaks out, it means it is in trouble; otherwise there is no need to cause a stir. By affirming its principles publicly and disowning their relatives who had rejected the mafia code, women played a role in supporting the mafia system. The strong attachment to mafia

²¹See Operazione *Ghiaccio*, December 2002, *Giornale di Sicilia*, 7 Dicembre 2002, and, Richiesta per l'applicazione di misure cautelari, Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia di Palermo (Proc. n. 16676/01).

²²This is a well known tradition, confirmed by pentito Vincenzo La Piana during our encounter. Interview with Vincenzo La Piana, Bologna, 2 April 2004.

²³Siebert, in AA.VV., 'Donne di mafia', in *donne e mafie*, pp. 29-30.

²⁴Renate Siebert, *unpublished paper*.

mentality was usually shown by those women this thesis calls 'internal to the mafia'. In this sense, the reactions were indicative of the female relatives of the Di Filippo Brothers who helped police arrest Leoluca Bagarella in 1994.²⁵ Giusy Spadaro, wife of Pasquale Di Filippo, along with Angela Marino, wife of Emanule, phoned the major Italian press agency, *ANSA*, and said: 'The guys from the *DIA* (*Direzione Investigativa Antimafia*) came to offer us protection but we refused. Write it down; let people know. We did nothing wrong; we are good people; we have nothing to repent for.'²⁶ A few days later they called a press conference during which they declared: 'We would prefer they were killed. When I heard the police knocking at the door, I thought, "Now they will tell me my husband has been killed." No, it was worse. If he was dead, I would have more honour.'²⁷ Often women use their power over children to blackmail men as Giusy did: 'I said to my children "You have no father anymore. Disown him; forget him."'²⁸ Similarly, Angela declared: 'When I found out he'd repented, I told my children their father would come back soon. But now they have to forget him; actually, they have already forgotten him. To them he is dead, like they've never had a father.'²⁹ After a few months, Giuseppina Spadaro decided to rejoin her husband Pasquale. In trial documents regarding Riina's sons, charged with mafia association, there was an interesting passage from an intercepted telephone call when Giusy's brother, a mafia member, in talking with another mafia member, addressed his sister as '*sbirra*' ('a female cop'). This example confirmed that the category of 'amoral familism' could be used in analysing the internal workings of mafia families, as explained in chapter four. In other words, Spadaro's case demonstrated that family relations had value only in relation to the smooth operation of the mafia organisation. From the attitude of Giusy's brother, we can understand why Giusy was against her husband's collaboration in the beginning. The fact she was 'internal to the mafia' meant she could not understand her husband's choice, which went against the normality of her environment and actually provoked shame. This latter feeling pushed Di Filippo's sister, Agata, to attempting

²⁵Richiesta per l'applicazione delle misure cautelari, Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia di Palermo, (Proc. n. 13100/00), p.145.

²⁶Puglisi, *Donne, mafia e antimafia*, p.47.

²⁷*il Mediterraneo*, 28-06-1995, quoted in Alessandra Dino, Angelo Meli, *Silenzi e parole dall'universo di Cosa Nostra*, Sigma Edizioni, Palermo, 1997, p. 54.

²⁸Longrigg, *Mafia Women*, p.124.

²⁹Anna Puglisi, "Non li ho partoriti io, è stato solo un sogno". Più che l'amor potè la cosca', *Narcomafie*, anno III, 9, ottobre 1995.

suicide. A day earlier she declared: 'We disassociate ourselves completely from the action of those two *infami*. We are closed within our home for shame. My father and mother are really upset. My mother does not feel well and I had to bring her to the hospital.'³⁰ In a statement published in *Giornale di Sicilia*, she defined them as "*infami e tragediatori*".³¹

Like the women of the Di Filippo brothers, those of *pentito* Vincenzo Scarantino met the press. He was charged with the murder of magistrate Paolo Borsellino. His testimony began in 1994 and was crucial in arresting others. When he was imprisoned his women had already protested, along with people from the Guadagna neighbourhood, in declaring Vincenzo innocent. Then, when news of his collaboration with justice spread, his wife, Rosalba, justified his action as follows: 'Enzo had a long beard; he was dirty. He told me he was afraid of being murdered... they gave him some injections, and told him it was the AIDS virus and that if he did not speak he would end up like Antonino Gioè.'³² But later she added a message to him: 'Examine your conscience.'³³ Finally she accused him of being gay, thereby labelling him with one of the worst offences in the mafia social and cultural context. However, after a while Rosalba came back to him with her sons; she changed her mind and made a televised appeal to women of the mafia, urging them to give their husbands ultimatums to abandon crime. 'We women often cover up for everything; we pretend not to see; we tolerate terrible things,' said Rosalba Scarantino. 'You have to understand that it is better to renounce the jewels, furs and cars. Either convert your man or leave him.'³⁴ Vincenzo's mother and mother-in law kept protesting against the state, accused of having kidnapped their son, daughter and nephews.³⁵ Later, when there were rumours that Vincenzo was withdrawing his testimony, his mother Giuseppa Di Lisi was more than happy, admitting that it was not a state kidnapping. 'Then it is true that miracles exist. God illuminated your mind. He told me that he is going to withdraw everything. Soon he will call the judges and will repeat what he told us. He made up everything; I insist. This time he really understood he was wrong. God willing... God willing.'³⁶ Another negative reaction came from Giuseppa Mandarano, wife of Marco Favaloro who was

³⁰Principato, Dino, *Mafia Donna*, p.17.

³¹*Giornale di Sicilia*, 28 giugno 1995.

³²*ibid.*

³³*ibid.*

³⁴*Sunday Times*, 16 November, 1997.

³⁵Puglisi, *Donne, mafia, e antimafia*.

³⁶*l'Unità*, 27 luglio 1995.

condemned for the murder of a Palermo businessman. She started dressing in black since she was in mourning because she considered her husband dead. When the news of Favaloro's *pentimento* appeared, she said: 'He is not a *pentito* he is an *infame*. The same night that I discovered it, I opened the wardrobe, took his clothes and burned them. Here, in his house, there is nothing of his, not even a shirt or a handkerchief.'³⁷

Faced with such reactions, many *pentiti* give up their collaboration. This was the case with Vincenzo Buffa, as Giovanni Falcone told Marcelle Padovani:

Some women, unfortunately not rare, have not yet gotten in line with the culture of life. I am thinking of the wife of Vincenzo Buffa who had begun to collaborate with me. I made the mistake of allowing him to speak with her, as he constantly asked me. And she convinced him to retract, to take back his declarations. She even organised a kind of revolt of the wives in the "bunker courtroom" of the "maxi-trial" in Palermo; they cried; they screamed; they protested loudly, not against Buffa who wanted to break with *omertà*, but against the judges who had "forced" him to act that way.³⁸

This episode dates back to 1987 when, during one of the hearings at the 'maxi-trial', Buffa's wife, mother and daughter cried: 'Enzo is not a betrayer; Enzo did not talk. And this is not a trial; he is not a *pentito*! Take him back to his prison cell in Ucciardone; nobody will kill him, they won't touch a hair on his head!' His wife, Caterina La Mantia declared: 'Write it down, write it down. My husband confided in me that they gave him some documents to sign without knowing what he was signing and he whispered in my ear, "They want me to become a *pentito* but I do not want to."³⁹

Without a doubt, those cases concerning mothers who disowned their sons/daughters after they decided to become *pentiti* give a clear idea of the extent of the pervasiveness of mafia ideology. Anna Puglisi has dealt with this delicate issue by telling the sad story of Enrico Incognito, who spoke out against the mafia by filming his testimony. As soon as the mafia knew his intention, the Incognito family was warned to stop him. Scared that the mafia would kill all of them, the family decided to eliminate Enrico, who had already been abandoned by his wife due to his decision. The man was alone; he only trusted one neighbour, whom he asked to record his testimony with a camera. On 26 March 1994, Enrico's mother went to the house where they were making the film, and pretended to ask how her son was. This was just an excuse to help her other son, Marco, the killer, enter the

³⁷*ibid.*, p. 17.

³⁸Falcone, Padovani, *Cose di Cosa Nostra*, pp. 85-86.

³⁹*Giornale di Sicilia*, 18 marzo 1987.

house. The camera recorded the beginning of the scene when Enrico was shot by his brother in front of his mother and father. They were all imprisoned, yet the mother was discharged because in the video she was crying close to Enrico. However, she was the one who made her son open the door so that Marcello and her husband could enter.⁴⁰

Another example of a mother disowning her daughter is that of Giovanna Cannova, mother of witness Rita Atria, whose story we will explore in the next section. Giovanna did everything she could to change her daughter's decision, although she had already lost her husband and son who were murdered by the mafia. She even denounced the Marsala Court for kidnapping her daughter, who was under eighteen, because the judges transferred Rita to a safe place as soon as she started to collaborate. After the death of Rita, who committed suicide one week after Magistrate Paolo Borsellino was murdered by a mafia bomb, Giovanna Cannova did not go to her daughter's funeral and later broke Rita's picture on the gravestone. She justified her action by declaring that she couldn't stand the fact that Rita's picture was chosen by her daughter-in law, Piera Aiello. As we will see, the latter had collaborated with the law after the death of her husband Nicola Atria; and Cannova felt her daughter had been badly influenced by her sister-in-law, Piera.⁴¹

Another story is that of *nonna eroina*, Angela Russo, whose activity in drug trafficking was analysed in chapter five. The trial against the woman and her collaborators was mainly based on the evidence given by her son, Salvatore Coniglio, who turned state's witness. During the trial she tried to discredit his testimony by stating: 'My son is completely crazy; when he was four years old he had meningitis and the doctor warned me that in the future he might show signs of mental illness. He threw me in prison, although I am innocent.'⁴²In an interview with Marina Pino about the *vendetta trasversale* of another son she said: 'This death was due to a vendetta and the fault was of another son, Savino, a miserable coward (...) and spy.'⁴³

The above stories are based mainly on newspaper articles. When using such sources, one needs to bear in mind they often have scandal mongering purposes, thus showing a superficial and perhaps distorted image of women disowning their relatives. Instead, these women must be feeling so many various emotions that it is difficult to identify them. What

⁴⁰*ibid.*

⁴¹Puglisi, *Donne, mafia e antimafia*.

⁴²*ibid.*

⁴³Pino, *Le signore della droga*, p. 77.

is sure is that their stories, whatever were the reasons of rejecting a relative who undertook the path of justice indicated the strength of the mafia.

Prosecutor Alessandra Camassa, in the interview that is part of the documentary 'A Girl Against the mafia' directed by Marco Amenta, observed in relation to the clash between Giovanna Cannova and her daughter Rita Atria: 'It was a war between two worlds. One that had made a hard decision and the other, that archaic mafia world... that denied any possibility, even the idea of helping the law.'⁴⁴ This is to say that Giovanna Cannova was so attached to mafia principles, including the law of silence, that she could not accept her daughter's choice. Anna Puglisi's words may help us better understand this argument: .

There is a whole conscious support from the mafia culture, therefore the *pentimento* is considered as a form of high treason against the mafia association, which is a secret and para-state association that needs to remain secret, and thus must be denied even when faced with the clearest evidence. The *pentimento* is an act of surrender to the state. (...) Breaking down family ties means that the mafia family must be stronger than the natural one because the former maintains social roles that would be impossible to play without it. There is a tragic, criminal and necrophiliac notion of existence (the normality of murders, suffering and death) that women "play." This does not mean that they simulate, but that they stress their role in order to make their self-promotion more effective.'⁴⁵

Unfortunately, this attitude of rejection in the name of 'mafia values' characterised not only the old generation, but also the new one, as demonstrated in the case of a Calabrian girl reported by Prosecutor Boemi to Renate Siebert. Antonio Libri, a mafia hit man, changed his mind about collaborating with police after meeting with his wife. From the reasons she showed Boemi, she seemed to believe strongly in the mafia mentality: 'My husband must not collaborate because we have to keep living in Reggio Calabria as honoured people.' Although her fear of retaliation may have been behind this affirmation, it gives us a glimpse of what it means to mafiosi to have a *pentito* in their own family; it is a shame since it brings the loss of family honour and consequently respect from others. What is striking, as Boemi underlined, was that the above woman was young (25-years-old) and living in the contemporary world: 'This woman kept saying to me that if her husband kept collaborating she wouldn't allow him to see their child, the only child they had, and she said that she would consider him a dead man.'⁴⁶ Once again, women used the power stemming from their role as mothers for blackmailing men.

⁴⁴Marco Amenta, *Diario di una siciliana ribelle*, 1998, documentario. English edition: *A girl against the Mafia*.

⁴⁵Puglisi, *Donne, mafia e antimafia*, p. 54.

⁴⁶Siebert, 'Donne di mafia', in AA.VV., *donne e mafie*, p. 29.

To confirm this attachment to mafia principles by new generations, we need only mention those sons and daughters who did not accept their fathers or mothers decisions to abandon the mafia. For example, Vincenzo La Piana was disowned not only by his wife, but also by his sons.⁴⁷ Indeed, losing their own lovers was one of the risks *pentiti* assumed. The issue regarding the difficulties behind the choice of turning state's evidence will be explored in the next section devoted to women who collaborated with justice.

7. 2. *Women who turn state's evidence: from vendetta to the rejection of mafia culture*

Often vendetta lay behind a woman's decision to collaborate with justice; the death of a relative causes women to ask the state to condemn the person who caused their grief. An exemplary case of attempting to commit vendetta by law was that of Serafina Battaglia, mentioned in chapter four. Called by the media *la vedova della mafia* (the mafia widow),⁴⁸ the woman testified against the mafiosi who murdered her husband and then her son. Her first attempt to avenge her husband, Stefano Leale, shot dead in a mafia feud in the late 1950s, failed. Serafina had entrusted the vendetta to her son, for whom she had procured a weapon and a bodyguard.⁴⁹ Though not a mafia member, he obeyed his mother but was killed in 1962, only two years after Leale's death, without being able to avenge his father.⁵⁰ At that point, Serafina decided to tell everything she knew about the mafia to judge Cesare Terranova, testifying at many trial hearings.⁵¹ Eventually, even after nine years of peregrination around Italian courts, the witness never obtained justice, since many of the convicted mafiosi were acquitted for lack of evidence.⁵² As Renate Siebert rightly commented, for this woman, 'unfortunately, justice did not show itself a valid alternative to a private vendetta.'⁵³ It must be added that Serafina showed great courage, because she conducted her battle before any witness program existed. For this reason, she might be considered the pioneer of collaborators with justice.

⁴⁷Interview with Vincenzo La Piana, Bologna, 2 April 2004.

⁴⁸'Ritorna in Assise la vedova della mafia. Dal 9 dicembre nuovo processo ad Ancona', *Giornale di Sicilia*, 6 Dicembre 1970.

⁴⁹For the mafia feud in which Stefano Leale was involved see the Documents of Antimafia Commission which made reference also to Serafina Battaglia's testimony. Archivio italiano, Testo integrale della Relazione della Commissione Parlamentare d'inchiesta sul fenomeno della mafia, Volume terzo, Cooperativa Scrittori, Roma, 1973, doc. 2332, 476.

⁵⁰'Serafina Battaglia accusa e Marco Semilia si discolpa', *Giornale di Sicilia*, 10 Dicembre 1970.

⁵¹Puglisi, *Donne, mafia e antimafia*, p. 91.

⁵²*ibid.*, p. 80

⁵³Siebert, *Le donne, la mafia*, p. 294.

Again, vendetta was at the core of Giacomina Filippello's testimony since her partner, Natale L'Ala, boss of Campobello di Mazara, was murdered in 1990. As seen in chapter four, his rivals had already attempted to murder him several times.⁵⁴ Giacomina theatrically described her feelings, when her lover was killed, to journalist Francesco La Licata:

When they came and told me they had killed Natale, my eyes clouded over and my legs started to shake. I ran like a crazy woman: I found him in the supermarket in Campobello. They had made a mess of him. Twenty-five shots from a machine gun, every one a bulls-eye. They used Kalashnikovs because he'd had his car armoured and so they needed a gun that could shoot through the bullet-proof body. Excessive prudence. They'd surprised him, defenceless as a bird. He didn't even realise he was about to die. He was standing; he fell like a ripe fruit. I had expected it after the two earlier attempts. I knew that sooner or later the bad news would come. But I couldn't imagine the pain would be that strong. I hugged him; I kissed his forehead. I didn't cry; I didn't scream. I was stone. I felt there was a crowd behind me, but I didn't see anyone; I heard no voices. I saw his pistol, touched it; I took it, hid it under my jacket, right in front of everybody. And I left, with my head held high. I thought of avenging him right away. I said to myself then, "If I see Don Alfonso, I'll shoot him in the mouth. I saw neither Don Alfonso, nor the others that I was sure had done that massacre. I said, "Those who must pay, will pay."⁵⁵

It is not surprising that Giacomina affirmed: 'Collaborating with the law was my vendetta,'⁵⁶ thus showing that her testimony was in line with mafia mentality. That is why her decision, as much as that of Serafina, did not correspond to an act of female liberation. On the contrary, it was an expression of the pillar of the mafia value system, the vendetta, with the consequence of perpetuating a male-dominated world.

To conclude this section, it is worth retelling the story of the youngest Italian witness, Rita Atria. Her case is interesting because her decision stemmed from a wish for vendetta, yet soon shifted into an emancipatory action. Belonging to a historic mafia family from Partanna, a little village in the Valle del Belice between Trapani and Agrigento, in 1991 Rita went to the *carabinieri* to speak out against those who murdered her father, Vito (in 1985), and brother, Nicola (in 1991). The latter had tried in vain to avenge his father's death, yet he was anticipated and shot dead in his restaurant. According to Prosecutor Alessandra Camassa, the first to hear Rita's testimony, the girl was motivated by 'the same blind rage that, after the murder of Vito Atria, had stimulated the son to infiltrate the mafia

⁵⁴For a detailed and colourful description of Giacomina Filippello's story see Longrigg, *Mafia Women*, pp. 223-229.

⁵⁵Madeo, *Donne di mafia*, p. 58.

⁵⁶Longrigg, *Mafia Women*, p. 229.

clan to take the vendetta on himself, revenge his father's murder and clear the family honour.'⁵⁷ Perhaps the fact she was a young woman led her to find another way of accomplishing the vendetta. Piera Aiello, in the documentary 'A Girl Against the Mafia', based mainly on Piera's account and family documents, said that when Vito Atria was murdered, Nicola and Rita stood in front of Vito's coffin held each other's hands and 'silently swore to avenge his death.'⁵⁸ Fortunately, Rita met Prosecutors Paolo Borsellino and Alessandra Camassa who offered her another perspective. Therefore she was able to turn to a new cultural structure and eventually took the same path of those women who turned state's evidence due to their rejection of mafia principles. This thesis maintains such behaviour can be read within a perspective of real female emancipation, which means individual self-affirmation. When women find the courage to leave the culture of death that informs the mafia, the *pentiti* law becomes an opportunity to set them and their children free from the male dominated mafia culture.

Apparently, it might seem easy to leave a violent environment; on the contrary, it is a very difficult experience. This becomes much harder in cases where one has grown up in a mafia family since they have turned against the mafia code that represents the framework of their own primary socialisation. Even when the reasons for turning state's witness come from refusing the mafia system, it is the death of a relative that pushes the woman to offer her own testimony. However, there is no feeling of revenge, but rather the desire that this kind of tragedy will never occur again. That is why this attitude can be located within an emancipation perspective; by collaborating with justice, women find a way to escape from the gender regime of the mafia, thus affirming their individuality. In this sense, the story of Piera Aiello offers us a good example. After the tragic death of her young husband, Nicola Atria, Piera ran to police to tell everything she knew. As she said in the documentary, even when her husband was alive, Piera tried to convince him to collaborate with the justice system. Coming from a family with no mafia connections, she did not agree with mafia values. Prosecutor Alessandra Camassa told Clare Longrigg:

Piera Aiello was unusual for a mafia wife because she wanted to find out; she wanted to know everything. She gave us a lot of detailed information on the Partanna mafia. It wasn't vendetta she was after; she isn't the type. She didn't have

⁵⁷Sandra Rizza, *Rita Atria. Una ragazza contro la mafia*, La Luna, Palermo, 1993, p.76.

⁵⁸Amenta, *Diario di una siciliana*.

a particularly high opinion of her husband; actually, she thought he was a *cretino*. She wanted to get away, to start a new life.⁵⁹

The words used by Alessandra Camassa to define the nature of Pietra's decision give us the idea of what I mean by defining the collaboration with justice as one of the shapes female emancipation can take on in the mafia. Talking to the police has a sort of cathartic effect, because it liberates from mafia tyranny and allows individuals to become free to behave in a way that conforms to the legitimate world.

For women who grow up in the mafia, the clash between the two worlds, before collaboration and after collaboration, is so conflicting that it entails getting rid of the past cultural structure to assume a new one. This dichotomy between the two worlds appears clear in Rita Atria's experience. As anticipated above, she stated immediately that her confession was aimed at sending the people guilty of her father and brother's murders to prison. Therefore, her action was rooted in principles corresponding to those of her original mafia environment. Her constant relationship with Prosecutor Paolo Borsellino gradually opened her view, bringing her to a gradual and painful shift in perspective. The image of her father had been a positive one, since she considered him someone to whom needy people went to ask favours. Later on, she changed this image negatively by realising he was a criminal. After this discovery, she needed to find a substitute figure of reference, which she found in Paolo Borsellino who became her surrogate father.

Rita's story was recounted by journalist Sandra Rizza who in her book mentioned passages from Rita's diary she used to write during the period of her collaboration. Marco Amato's documentary, quoted above, is another valuable source in reconstructing Rita's life, even before her collaboration with the law. Combining these two sources gives a deep view of Rita's sad story and also an idea of the various feelings of the young woman. At the beginning of her experience, she felt frustrated because when she communicated her intention to the *carabinieri*, they did not believe her testimony. This was not just because she was female and young, but she also belonged to a mafia family. Thus, she had to fight to make herself credible. Later, Prosecutors Camassa and Borsellino started to listen to her testimony until she received the first threat and then she was sent to Rome to live with Piera Aiello under protection. In her diary, Rita described her feelings of living in a big city like Rome, which to her, coming from a small Sicilian village, appeared much bigger than it was in reality. There are moving pages on her feelings of emptiness provoked by

⁵⁹Longrigg, *Mafia Women*, p. 231.

living in hiding and, more than this, without love since she had been rejected by her mother and also by her sister who lived in Milan. Alessandra Camassa remembered: 'Rita was young, she needed a family environment. But her mother rejected her for testifying and she rejected her mother for not supporting her. So judge Borsellino intervened. He sought a responsible solution. Rita needed her mother. He arranged many trips to Sicily so Rita could meet her mother. I was present at some meetings. They weren't very nice.'⁶⁰

What made Rita suffer was also the impression that her sacrifice would be worthless:

I am pretty sure that Culicchia (the mafia boss of Partanna whom she had accused) will never go to prison. He murdered, stole and cheated; yet no one will be able to find the evidence to accuse him and prove I'm telling the truth. I am sure that I will never be able to make judges believe me; I wish my father were here, because he could find the evidence to make him appear what he really is; that is Culicchia who is only a cheating murderer; yet obviously the words of a 17-year-old are worthless. I am only a young girl who wants justice and he is a man who plays the role of the good and honest worker very well. I can't live anymore, but he will keep on stealing and concealing that he was the person who carried out Stefano Nastasi's murder. As usual, the person who is better at cheating in the life is the one who wins.⁶¹

Her thoughts were typical of an adolescent who was going through a terrible experience:

It is almost nine o'clock p.m. and I am sad and discouraged because I am not able to dream anymore; in my eyes, I see only darkness. I am not worried about the fact that I will die but the fact that I will never be loved by anybody. I will never be happy and realise my dreams. I would like to have Nicola here, to be petted by him; I need it; but the only thing that I can do is cry. No one will understand the emptiness within myself, that emptiness that gradually everything has increased. I haven't anything anymore; I have only crumbs. I can't distinguish good from bad, because everything is gloomy and miserable. I believed that time could heal all wounds; on the contrary, time opens them up more and more until you die slowly. When will this nightmare end?⁶²

However, she continued dreaming since she was only 17 years old. Indeed, in her diary she wrote notes about new experiences in Rome. Here, unlike in Partanna, she experienced a new freedom; she had the chance to meet a young man who became her boyfriend. Nonetheless, her world fell apart when her surrogate father Borsellino was killed by the mafia. I was Rita's same age when this happened. I remember my shock and disorientation when I heard the news of Borsellino's death; and I remember the need to talk with my father and receive some kind of explanation from him. This happened to me, and I had nothing to do with Borsellino, apart from knowing him from television and newspapers

⁶⁰ Amenta, *Diario di una siciliana*,

⁶¹ Rizza, *Rita Atria*, p. 130.

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 128.

because of his antimafia commitment. This gives some measure of what could have crossed Rita's mind. She decided to throw herself from the balcony. The suicide note she left said:

Now that Borsellino is dead, no one can understand the emptiness he left in my life. Everybody is scared, but my only fear is that the mafia State will win and those stupid people that fight against the mafia will be murdered. Before fighting the mafia you have to examine your conscience and then, after having defeated the mafia that is within yourself, you can combat the mafia that there is among your friends; we are the mafia and our wrong way of behaviour. Borsellino, you died for what you believed in, yet I am dead without you.⁶³

Within the mafia modern changes are usually exploited to satisfy criminal exigencies and thus do not bring a progressive shift. However, Rita's turning state's witness can be read positively, despite its tragic endinas Siebert's reflections make clear: 'Her choice to collaborate with the justice system, beyond any contingent motives (i.e. the desire to 'avenge' the death of her family members) was a choice of emancipation. In the difficult post-adolescent phase, Rita took a turn in her own life's trajectory. Flying toward the banner of liberty is a common gesture among many young people her age; but it is a forbidden dream for those who grow up in the shadow of mafia (dis)values.'⁶⁴As a positive model, Rita's story should be told to the younger generation. The beautiful and suffering words in Rita Atria's diary should be remembered as much as those from Anna Frank's diary due to their powerful educative meaning.

Finally, it is worth concluding this section with the story of Margherita Petralia who decided to collaborate with the law to run away from the violent context in which she was compelled to live. Her testimony was written in a diary she started in 1983 and handed over to investigators two years later when she left her husband. Her diary is a valuable document in reconstructing the mafia in Paceco (a town near Trapani), whose head was her father-in-law, Vito Sugamiele.⁶⁵As seen in chapter four, Vito and Margherita's husband, Gaspare, were compelled to abdicate their leading mafia positions because the community knew that Margherita had had an affair.⁶⁶Margherita was scared of them all the time, since

⁶³*ibid.*, p. 137.

⁶⁴Siebert, *Le donne, la mafia*, p. 141.

⁶⁵For a clear explanation of the development of the mafia in Paceco and Trapani areas see Sent. Nr. 4/2001 del 17.05.2001, Corte d'Assise di Trapani. Here there is also a part devoted to the analysis of the reliability of Margherita Petralia's testimony.

⁶⁶Interview with Public Prosecutor Massimo Russo, Palermo, 4 September 2003.

the oppression of women reigned in their family. Significantly Margherita told Alessandra Dino:

I was tired of him. My husband was always on the run. The love shifted to hate. I couldn't stand his behaviour. I couldn't do anything therefore I started to write. He beat me. "This man is going to kill me," I thought and I wanted to run away. I wrote the diary against violent acts. I wanted to leave but I did not know how. Therefore, I started to write. I kept writing. I wanted to preserve myself. I was scared that my children could not remain alone in the street without me.⁶⁷

In parts of the diary she describes her subordination to her husband:

I am the wife of Gaspare Sugamiele. I am his wife in the sense that a long time ago I married him, but in reality I am the servant, his whore, for him to have his way when the urge takes him; I am also his punchbag whenever he feels like lashing out. If I dare to open my mouth, I get a good kicking. Unfortunately, I wished all this on myself, and now I've got three children to look after, so there is nothing I can do.⁶⁸

Keeping a *memoriale* where she wrote down everything she heard and got from the mafia family, including illegal trafficking and the corruption of investigators, was not only a way to blackmail them, but also a desire to tell the truth. Therefore, the wish to say what she knew came from a sincere rejection of that criminal world, and of the *omertà* that reigned in her environment: '... because everything that happens in Sicily is them and all the other mafia bosses from other provinces united together and they make up this disgusting mess that everybody knows about and nobody says anything about.'⁶⁹

7. 3. *The story of Rita Di Giovine*

Turning state's evidence causes more suffering in the case of members of the Calabrian mafia, where talking against the mafia means automatically speaking out against the closest relatives. This is because the 'Ndrangheta has a horizontal structure whose core is the natural family. That is why there are fewer defectors in the 'Ndrangheta than in the Cosa Nostra where, due to its centralised structure, most of the time the defector's confession is addressed against other mafia members rather than blood relatives.

The story of Rita Di Giovine, a *pentita* who belonged to the Serraino-Di Giovine 'Ndrangheta family, can be reconstructed through the court and other legal documents concerning the mafia clan, and above all, as already anticipated in the introduction of this thesis, thanks to an interview she gave me in 1998.

⁶⁷Dino, Meli, *Silenzi e parole*, p. 44.

⁶⁸Transaltion borrowed from Longrigg, *Mafia Women*, p. 209. Margherita now lives alone in North of Italy, disowned by her son and daughter. For details of her story see Longrigg, *Mafia Women*, pp. 205-211.

⁶⁹Dino, Meli, *Silenzi e parole*, p. 117.

Arrested in Verona on 31 March 1993 at the age of 36, in possession of thousands of Ecstasy tablets, she decided to collaborate with investigators and thus informed them where the members of the Serraino-Di Giovine clan were hiding drugs and money. Afterward, she revealed details of everything else she knew about the criminal organisation in which, moreover, many women were involved. The stories of these women, including the head of the clan, Maria Serraino, drug trafficker Livia De Martino and financial mediator Marisa Di Giovane, have already been explored in this thesis thanks to the information given by Rita in our encounter.

The use of Rita Di Giovine's case study is not intended to 'prove' the argument of this thesis, yet it is a way to illustrate it through a life history.⁷⁰ Indeed, Rita's story is particularly significant, insofar as she exemplifies the ambiguous condition of mafia women; she was an active protagonist in her mafia clan and yet at the same time was subordinate to the men of her family. In addition, her case is interesting because she was able to become independent from her mafia family by collaborating with the State, thereby constructing a new life based on principles contrary to those at the very core of the mafia. This leads us to interpret her decision as a choice of life and thus of female liberation.

At this point it is worth to make a few observations concerning the method I used to conduct, interpret and present the interview with Rita Di Giovine, which was an 'open-ended dialogue'.⁷¹ In conducting the interview I was not only a researcher aware of creating, producing a document with a story of life, but also a woman listening to the story of another woman. This dual identity of the researcher is not a drawback of collecting oral sources, but rather an advantage because it allows one to create 'the conditions in which the object of research enters into the process as an active subject.'⁷² By recognising 'the objects of the research as subjects in their own rights' the researcher is able use stories of life for academic purpose without making 'the research relationship an exploitative one'.⁷³ Such approach enables me to develop with Rita a collaborative interactive relationship.⁷⁴ The method of reading and presenting the interview was in line with the just mentioned way of conducting it. In fact, the interpretation of the interview was conditioned

⁷⁰For useful methodological considerations concerning the use of case study see Scarpitti Frank R., and Andersen Margaret L., *Social Problems*, Harper & Row, 1989, pp.568-570.

⁷¹Portelli, 'Oral History', p. 30.

⁷²Joan Acker, Kate Barry, and Johanna Esseveled, 'Objectivity and Truth. Problems in Doing Feminist Research', in Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith A. Cook (eds.), *Beyond Methodology. Feminist scholarship as lived research*, Indiana University Press, 1991, p. 136.

⁷³*ibid.*, p.136.

⁷⁴Gelsthorpe, *Feminist Perspectives*, p. 91.

by my preoccupation with the ethical dilemma of treating a life history as one of the sources of my research. However, moral doubts allowed me to remain an observer who takes nothing for granted and shows respect when interpreting the words offered by the informer. In terms of presentation, the interview will be treated by limiting my intervention in order to avoid interrupting her narrative. There will be no need to illustrate my perspective, which is made clear by the selection of the quotations from the interview.

Rita's words have already helped us to explore the roles of women in the 'Ndrangheta throughout the thesis. She depicted a reality characterized by women deeply involved both in mafia activities and mafia ideology, and of women somewhat subordinated to male power. In essence, her picture showed the multiple identity of women in the mafia, which we amply investigated in chapters four and five. In the following pages, I wish to use Rita's testimony to draw our attention on what it means to become a *pentita* and live as a *pentita*. This will allow us to understand the problems surrounding such a decision, overlooked and unknown by public opinion that tends to portray *pentiti* as unworthy people, exploiting the State.

As we have seen in the previous section, various motivations compel a mafioso/a to turn state's witness. However, we suggested two main reasons: vendetta and the rejection of mafia principles. Psychological and physical violence experienced by Rita in her family were crucial in Rita's need to change her life. Her decision to collaborate with justice can be understood as a form of 'internal' revenge, which was the starting-point of her path to emancipation. Her experience had nothing to do with the typical mafia vendetta, which is an 'external' revenge as a result of the murder of a relative. This analysis is clear by considering how she replied to my opening question, which was about the reason behind her decision to leave her usual world to undertake an unknown route under the protection of the traditional enemy, i.e. the State:

It was a decision from my heart, because you know I unfortunately live in a family which is unworthy; it is rich in drugs, in weapons, in killings; it is rich in the working life, but it is not rich in the sentimental life; the sentimental life of a person is nothing for them; they don't care; they don't have problems; they live for the money that in the end they do not have, for the work that in the end, what does it bring? It brings you to selling drugs... to all of this, not to a quiet future; in the end you do not have anything.

Rita, thus, was driven by a sincere desire to turn a page, as soon as she realized that the life she had led until then 'was not worthy.' She excluded revenge as a possible

explanation: 'I did not collaborate for revenge because revenge is useless; I am already dead inside; I am not keen on sending them to prison; I did it because I felt like doing it, but they cannot come to tell me that the fault is mine.'⁷⁵

As mentioned above, the violence she experienced, and the fact her mother did not protect her, influenced her action. Though she did not need proper revenge, she was still looking for a way to leave the people who treated her badly. More than this, she was fed up with living in the underworld: which meant running away, house searches, seeing people (including relatives) who died from drugs, constant violence and so on.⁷⁶ As she put it, '...after a long story, you see that and you arrive at the point at which you say "we cannot go on here anymore."⁷⁷ Moreover, the fact that her brothers and mother were completely unmoved by the numerous deaths of family members compelled her to give up. Rita was shocked by a phrase her brother Antonio said after the death of a sister:

He said: "Who cares? She died from a shot; she was just a damn junkie." He did not even come to the funeral. So from that moment on I started to think that I couldn't go on like that. She was not a damn junkie; she was only a weak person, unlike me, who always had drugs in my hands 24 hours a day; yet I did not use them; she was weak like the others; so she started abusing drugs when she was 14 years old."⁷⁸

Antonio's attitude gives a clear idea of kin relations in a mafia family, dominated by amoral familism. In this regard the Serraino Di Giovine family is exemplary. As emerged not only from Rita's account but also from trial sources, familiar members betrayed and blackmailed each other all the time.

Describing her past, despite the nostalgia she felt for the luxurious aspects of her life, Rita admitted: 'life was worthless; people themselves were worthless (...) I was fed up with seeing my seven-year-old daughter see my sister dead in the toilet, and having to run and call the ambulance and try to resuscitate my sister. This was traumatic for my daughter. These kinds of episodes went on until I decided to give up.'⁷⁹ The future of her children was the main reason prodding her. Unfortunately, there was no hope of saving her elder son, born out of her incestuous relation with her father, because he was much too involved in the criminal environment. While the other two, a 19-year-old daughter and 10-year-old son, were taken away from that violent world.

⁷⁵Interview with Rita Di Giovine, Milan, 24 April 1998.

⁷⁶*ibid.*

⁷⁷*ibid.*

⁷⁸*ibid.*

⁷⁹*ibid.*

In reading her decision to collaborate as a choice of liberation, it should be said that her decision was not driven by an opportunistic calculation; she did not know anything about the state's benefits:

When I made this decision I did not know that there was the witness program (...) Nobody asked me anything; nobody compelled me; they were really kind; the only thing I said... it was three in the morning; they let me rest then they told me "just relax here;" I looked them in the face, after calling the *maresciallo*, and said, "I intend to talk; I will tell you what I know"... Just like that... I did it on instinct. He replied to me, "Are you sure?" And I said, "At the moment I am sure; I don't know later; if tomorrow I wake up badly, I don't know." One night in the police station, the day after I started calmly without anybody ever asking me anything. In fact, they did not believe what I told them since it seemed impossible that I had started to talk.⁸⁰

Rita's decision involved denouncing the criminal involvement of all the members of her blood family, including herself. If she did not collaborate with justice, she would have a light sentence. On the contrary, she preferred risking a harsher sentence so she could leave her 'dirty' life. Later on, she learned about the reduction of punishment offered by the state in exchange for her information. As she told me: '... I had a reduction in punishment; I must be honest; I have got a lot of punishment reductions because I was sentenced to two years and five months, but I served all those years.'⁸¹

Despite the positive aspects of punishment reductions, her decision has involved a drastic change in her life and mentality and the constant risk of being murdered by members of her clan who remain free, such as her Calabrian relatives. When I asked her if she was scared of death she replied:

I swear to you, since I made this choice, I have known the positive and negative implications; I know that from one day to the next, I should expect to see somebody in front of me; because I have this person always in front of my mind; I always see somebody, because unfortunately I am known, therefore eventually I always run into somebody; but, it does not matter much to me, because I know that sooner or later, if they want to... they'll find you, even in America; so you shouldn't be scared of death, otherwise you stop living.⁸²

The fear of dying did not stop her from undertaking the path of *collaboration with justice*, however it is important to note, as we will see soon, that this time the circumstances were favourable, unlike in the past. In fact, Rita had already thought of a possible collaboration in case she was arrested, but she did not due to her lack of trust in the state.

⁸⁰*ibid.*

⁸¹*ibid.*

⁸²*ibid.*

It crossed my mind in 1985 yet I did not trust anybody, otherwise I would have already given up a long time ago. The courage to go to the police station and say, "Arrest me, I am here," no I couldn't do this because I was always scared; then I had young children, even if I wasn't a good mother (...) In 1986, when my sister died, I decided if somebody came – since I'm the one with the drugs - and catch me, if I trust... The thing is I didn't trust the law, or anything...' ⁸³

Trust in public officials is a key aspect in developing a fruitful relationship between the person who has turned state's witness and the criminal justice system. All the *pentiti* I met stressed this point. Rita remembered that the fact she met people who respected her was crucial. Until she was arrested in Verona her experience with public officials was negative, not only because she committed crimes, but as she told me:

When I went to the police station to report that my car was stolen, the first thing they said was: "Hey, Di Giovine is here". It was not my fault my car was stolen; even if I belong to the Di Giovine family, I needed to report the theft; in that case they push you away, even if you had the instinct to say another word, only to feel their arrogance... also knowing that there were corrupt officials in that police station made you angry. I have always been a polite person with everybody; I have never turned impolitely to anyone who stopped me, never; I have always treated people with politeness and kindness; therefore one day I said, "Detective inspector, I respect you for your job and you respect me as a person. I have never done anything against you, so you saying in a disrespectful way "the Di Giovine" like you were saying "piece of shit" is intolerable, unfortunately I am one of the Di Giovine family, but if someone has stolen my car, can't I report it? (...)" We were really far away from the law because they treated us like this; I found the trust to collaborate when they arrested me on 31 March, five years ago in Verona because of the way I felt I was treated. By chance, it was a *maresciallo* that in reality is a police inspector, I don't know, I don't know how to explain it to you, he had a trustworthy face.' ⁸⁴

The encounter with Prosecutor Maurizio Romanelli was particularly significant for Rita, as she told me:

When I saw Dr. Romanelli for the first time, he had such a nice face, so friendly that I said "Yes, this would be the right moment." I had had dealings with other Prosecutors but I can guarantee you that as soon as I saw them I had a crisis since I was terrified... when I saw Romanelli the first time I remember him saying to me, "Madame, you are not obliged to do anything." And I replied to him that there weren't any problems because I had decided. And he said: "If you feel ready we can start.'" ⁸⁵

Similarly Giacoma Filippello said to Clare Longrigg about Prosecutor Paolo Borsellino: 'He was a lovely person, so understanding. I felt very close to him. When he talked to you,

⁸³*ibid.*

⁸⁴*ibid*

⁸⁵*ibid.*

you never felt he was the big man behind the desk. He was a real friend to me. I suppose he made me believe in the legal system.’⁸⁶Piera Aiello had a similar impression about Prosecutor Paolo Borsellino, who, as we have already seen, developed a special relationship with Rita Atria.⁸⁷

Rita Di Giovine’s reflections over the relationship with the State and the law throws light on what was going on within the mental structure of a woman who had been accustomed to considering the customs and rules of her clan right and, by confront, state law wrong. It reminds us that the notion of ‘normality’ is relative; we consider whatever we are accustomed to as ‘normal’. When a mafioso/a sincerely becomes a pentito/a, he/she has to modify his/her normality, the representation of the world in which he/she was brought up, and hence the content of words such as good and bad, right and wrong. This much is clear if you read the following passages of the interview in relation to the transmission of a certain mentality, already explored in chapter four. Indeed, Rita explained to me what it means to be born in an environment in which, ever since you were a child, adults have taught you that illegality is normal:

When somebody is in a family such as mine, no one can stop you. You can understand that it is wrong, and disagree with everything. However, you are there, you have to do it and that’s it. I do not have the chance to say “I am going far away from here;” I did not have an escape route, I have no money, I was always dependent on my mum.’

This reflection brought her to justify her criminal deeds insomuch as she did not feel guilty: ‘...if you think carefully, I do not have any guilt to expiate, I did not do anything abnormal, unfortunately living in that family I was doing a job.’⁸⁸From the point of view of her regular life, her criminal behaviour was normal. When I asked her for an explanation regarding drug trafficking or other illegal businesses, Rita apologised for the fact she forgot that I am ‘not normal’. ‘Sorry Ombretta, I talk to you as if I were talking with a normal person. This happens even with the lawyers; many times we do things therefore it is very easy for us to talk about them.’⁸⁹In other words, she had difficulties making herself clear when talking with people not belonging to the criminal world.

⁸⁶Longrigg, *Mafia Women*, p. 228.

⁸⁷Amenta, *Diario di una siciliana*,

⁸⁸Interview with Rita Di Giovine, Milan, 24 April 1998.

⁸⁹*ibid.*

Despite the fact the criminal word was understood by Rita to be normality, she confessed to feeling different compared to that normality. In fact, she remembered that she was considered 'bizarre' in her family or she was called 'the black sheep' of the family:

I think I was born different, in fact in my house they called me crazy because I had a different mentality from them (...) My mum kept saying that I was not her daughter, she told me that I was found under a plant (...) None of my family will collaborate with the state... I am the Black sheep of the family I have been always like that.⁹⁰

She maintained that although she shared a way of life with them, she felt a stranger in regards to certain aspects of the criminal organisation. For instance she ignored the formal rules of the 'Ndrangheta and she tried to rebel against the male violence, unlike other women who supported it in silence; she refused to cut the drugs in a deadly way; she was against the death sentences the clan sometimes deliberated; she rejected typical mafia values such as *omertá* and the vendetta. Perhaps this 'diversity' found expression in her successive decision to collaborate with law. An alternative analysis of such self-presentation, namely 'different' from the other criminal members of the family, might be the fact that she presented herself from her new perspective. This is a clear example of what I anticipated in the introduction, namely to what extent her present influenced her self-perception of the past. In looking back to her past she was searching for clues helping her to link her new identity (free from criminal behaviour) with her past. This has to do with the difficulties that pentiti do experience in changing their own identity. Indeed by talking with Rita I understood how tough and painful it is realising that the value system upon which you used to gauge your life was a dis-value when compared to a culture based on respect for the liberty of other human beings. A process of subversion of values, which obviously varies according to one's personality, occurs in any sincere *pentito*.

At the time I met Rita, she had not yet developed a definitive identity; hers was still hovering between past and present. This emerged from her words so much that when looking back she not only underlined the atrocity and violence of her life but also remembered nostalgic moments. She missed her comfortable life, although she recognised that it was not earned honestly. As I have already observed in relation to the tales of other *pentiti*, Rita's words and gestures revealed a sort of pride for having achieved a life of material comfort and consumer goods: 'I was doing fine, I had a housemaid, furs, gold jewellery, mobile phones; I was not short of anything; in my house, I never had to take an

⁹⁰*ibid.*

ashtray and move it; I was always served and revered.' Later, the new Rita added to the argument supported by the old Rita: 'However, it was not clean money.'⁹¹

On many occasions, Rita disclosed this internal and intimate process of transformation of a values system by showing the two contradictory and clashing identities, at times one prevailed over the other and vice-versa. By observing her gestures and afterward analysing her words, I could discern the two identities, which were the result of the transition from an illegal mentality to a legal one, and a busy life to an empty and solitary one. There is no doubt the passage was difficult, rough and full of conflicts. Contrasting opinions about her past life emerged all the time throughout our encounter: 'I described what really was my life, a life which was a hell, but also a heaven since you did not have to suffer hunger; there were 12 children and we never suffered hunger.'⁹² This nostalgia was not only due to the luxurious aspects of her life, but also for some particulars which were part of her everyday life: 'I was in love with my house, my furniture, my staff; I was crazy about them, just remembering them makes me cry; how can I explain it to you? Nowadays I wouldn't do my house up that way, however I still have it inside myself.'⁹³

Finally, the new identity prevailed, since she kept telling me she would still make such a choice again. Also, when she remembered with nostalgia and regret the comforts of life she used to have, immediately she underlined their illicit origin. And more than this, she stressed the fact that she would prefer having family love and a regular life instead of those comforts. 'You can have all the furs you wish; I had twelve of them, I'm not bragging, I'm just saying; I had jewellery, I had cars, but they weren't worth anything because what I needed was just one caress from my mother....'⁹⁴ Undoubtedly, Rita left many advantages in her past life. 'I was never at home; I was always running around, always in movement.' But she preferred her new life because it was clean, even though she felt alone.

Rita's two individualities correspond to her two names: her real name, Rita, and her new one, which obviously remains secret. It must be very hard to change one's own name at the age of 36, because on paper you get rid of your past life, even though it was an illegal one. The parts of the interview in which we addressed the delicate and intimate questions surrounding identity were indicative to the feelings of a *pentita*. The following

⁹¹*ibid.*

⁹²*ibid.*

⁹³*ibid.*

⁹⁴*ibid.*

quotation is from the last part of the interview, which was characterised by an empathetic atmosphere.

Q: Do you still feel like the same person or did you create a new identity?

A: I have created another person. You cannot cancel your past, even Jesus Christ cannot cancel that.

Q: Would you like to cancel it?

A: No. I would like to cancel certain years of my life, but those are the years you can never cancel; but not everything because rightly it is your life, from when I was one month old until I was 36, that was my life; you cannot cancel it; however inside myself, I feel like another person. I call myself by my true name when I get angry; I swear, it's weird; even in my mum's house she called me 'Margherita' when she was angry at me, namely with my true name; if she called me 'Rita' it meant she was calm; even now when I call myself by my real name it means I am angry, whereas I call myself with my second name when I am relaxed.

Q: So, your new name is your positive side?

A : Yes, my second name is really important, my second life....⁹⁵

As she told me, Rita could not cancel the past and the present was dominated by uncertainty and fear, because she could not reveal her true identity to anybody. This situation entailed difficulties in terms of human relationships:

I have some friends but you have to understand that in my condition I cannot reveal who I am; I always have to invent and unfortunately the invention, the lie brings about some limits, you have to limit yourself, you cannot overcome the limits, that is why I stay indoors."

D: "Can you invite your friends home?"

A: "Yes, yes, I can invite them but they have jobs; I told them I work. So I phone them after seven, namely after work. I told them I was a civil servant. My one vice is the phone. I spend half a million lire every two months. I know that it is bad, but it is my only diversion. When it is half past eight in the evening my heart starts to open up and I start, and I can't tell you with my daughter....⁹⁶

Even in terms of a romantic relationship, living as a *pentita* entails troubles:

If I meet a guy I should tell him the truth because after all he will find out. I would like to start a romantic relationship, but it will never be because of my character; I am a bit hard, but if I have to start something with a guy I want to base the relationship on sincerity not lies; it is useless for me to invent who I am... because later maybe one day you bump into somebody who will say: "Look, it's Rita, what are you doing here?" No I am sorry. And even this is an obstacle to meeting a guy.⁹⁷

Indeed in 1998, she was in a phase of her witness program where she had new documents yet was still testifying at the hearing, so she could not work. Therefore, she spent all her

⁹⁵Q is for question and A is for answer.

⁹⁶ibid.

⁹⁷ibid.

time indoors without the possibility of talking with anybody. She defined her life as a parasite, a vegetable:

Lately, I've become a vegetable. I don't recognise myself. I disgust myself this way. Sometimes I do get out of bed, I could say, why get up, I have my coffee, a whole three-cup coffee maker, I dust, I look at the house and I say to myself, "sure, nobody is ever here anyway." It is always clean, but what do I have to do? Every morning I dust... and clean. Then if you have something to read, I am crazy about books, I read many of them. I hate my bed, I hate it, I hate it. For two months I just go: living room, toilet and bed. Can you believe the skin on my back is ruined from staying in bed all the time, because what can you do? You go out, you are alone, I am not compelled to stay indoors, but I am alone and where do you go?⁹⁸

She wanted to work in order not to feel dependent on the State and spend her time doing something. This would have also contributed to her 'redemption:'

It seems to me that I'm stealing money that is not mine and then for my mind as well, because to me the most beautiful thing for a human being is having something to do, not living as a vegetable (...) In my view, it would be better if they found me a job and you earn the money (...) Anyway, to me anything is fine, I do not care, being a cleaning woman, a waitress, making beds, I don't care, it's not that I am a lady... I told you that I have always been waited on, but I have always said that I wanted to work and not stay at home. Since I was a child I dreamt of going to work in a factory; imagine this mania I had of punching a clock, but it was something that touched my soul; I used to see my neighbours coming back from the factory and punching the time clock and I used to say, "When I grow up I will go work in a factory." I've had this ever since I was a child. I don't know; I have never said that I would go to work in a bank. Or be a policewoman, you know? This is another hidden dream, but not just for me, for my daughter too. When she was a child and she saw the movies she'd say, "Mamma, I'm going to be a policewoman."⁹⁹

Once again, her words explain her self-perception of the past, and as such they need to be interpreted with caution. In fact, what we are observing is Rita's attempt to seek traces of lawful mentality in order to create the roots for building her new 'clean' identity. This mental process is much more understandable if we consider that in 1998 Rita was sure her life was a tunnel with no exit. 'What can I expect of the future? You, or my daughter, can expect something but not me (...) unfortunately; I am in a tunnel and it is very hard to get out... I got out of the scene but I'm still inside this tunnel and I could never have a different life.'¹⁰⁰

The above detailed description of Rita's feelings and life give us a clear idea of the early stage of her *pentimento* thus permitting us to understand later the extent of her further

⁹⁸*ibid.*

⁹⁹*ibid.*

¹⁰⁰*ibid.*

progress. At the time I met Rita, her strong and brave character led people who were close to her, including her lawyer Stellari, Prosecutor Romanelli and myself, to believe she would be able to regenerate and construct her future. During the collaboration, she had already demonstrated an acute intelligence, to the extent that Stellari had procured her some books. In a short time, she became a keen reader. This allowed her to gain a good level of ability in oral expression. Her dream in 1998 was to learn to write properly:

Writing is my handicap. Unfortunately, I stayed until the second year of secondary school; I have to thank books for what I've learned and the way I can express myself, otherwise...I do not know how to spell, I have to ask... to me this is something that I cannot tolerate. I tried to enrol in night school, but you have to pay. I cannot go to any school, and also in my area there is only one school and then they want your name and at that point you avoid it. I would like so much to write; it is something that I love but I can't write; I have to write in block letters to be able to understand what I write.¹⁰¹

From our encounter in 1998 to the present, Rita has made great progress and achieved a positive pole of the *pentimento*. Once she obtained the official change of identity, she enrolled in a school and took a diploma. Then, she worked as a volunteer helping people with disabilities. Finally, as provided by the state witness program, she received State money to buy a shop since she was in the last stage of the program, namely so-called '*capitalizzazione*'. Today, she has just started her new business; hopefully, she will manage to live by herself without the State's help.

There is no doubt that her initial choice dated back to 1993 and the subsequent development of her life led her to achieve real liberation. This story thus suggests us that the act of turning state's evidence is one of the routes mafia women can take to achieve female emancipation. This is evident not only by considering the life of Rita, but above all that of her daughter. Their story shows us to what extent the decision of collaborating with justice can have a powerful impact on generational transmission. That is why the relationship between Rita and her daughter might be read as a model showing that the structures of oppression 'can be altered by those who reproduce them'.¹⁰²

In the beginning, her daughter did not want to accept her mother's decision because she considered her an *infame* for betraying their family. Later on, she understood what that decision meant, as Rita proudly told me:

finally she got it, after three and a half years... At the beginning she wasn't happy, so she talked to me just because she was compelled to, to her I was a shitty mother

¹⁰¹*ibid.*

¹⁰²Frigga Haug, *Beyond Female Masochism*, Verso, London, 1997, p. 7.

because I should not have done what I did (...) Seven months ago my daughter finally said to me, "Mamma, you did the right thing and if anything bad ever happens to you, I will carry on along your path."¹⁰³

A generational transmission, which breaks a deeply rooted cultural model, needs the reciprocity of the relationship. To Rita, in fact, her daughter's support was fundamental in order to keep believing that hers was the right choice

I saved my children by making this choice, because now I can say that I saved my daughter; I talk to her every night and I can guarantee you she is a jewel, and she keeps telling me, "Thanks mum for what you did;" I'll never hear any such thing from my elder son; he is 25-years-old and he won't say "thanks mum" to me because he doesn't recognise me as his mother.¹⁰⁴

When Rita talked about her daughter, her eyes fill with joy

She is studying to be a cook. This is her last year then I hope the school will find her a job. She likes the gym; she loves everything; she is a volcano; I don't know how that girl can manage; she gets up at six, goes to school, comes back from school, goes to the gym, comes back from the gym, goes to the meeting... dear daughter, I cannot recognise you; you are not like your mother. This is beautiful, very beautiful (...) then it helps you understand you made the right choice ... at least having the satisfaction that your daughter says to you, "you did the right thing; if something happens to you, I will go on," "Where do you want to go? Calm down!" However, it is fantastic after everything I've been through, I think it is the greatest satisfaction.¹⁰⁵

In this case the relation daughter-mother shifted from being one of teaching a model of female oppression, as seen in chapter four, to being one of passing down a model of female liberation. Such shift is an example of the valuable effect of a single choice. In other words, the 'happy end' of Rita's story shows us to what extent the active role individuals may play in shaping their destiny, and thus in bringing social changes.¹⁰⁶ This might be understood better by using the sociological model developed by sociologist Anne Byrne to research the relation between women's self and social identity. Self-identity and social identity are obviously difficult to distinguish, however she provides us with a useful conceptualisation: 'Composed of elements serving to produce a personal, coherent narrative of self, self-identity is the arena in which the capacity for agency and innovatory action can develop. Self-identity is less influenced by roles, occupations and stereotypes than is social identity. Rather, values, choices, prioritising, planning and devising life plans

¹⁰³Interview with Rita Di Giovine, Milan, 24 April 1998.

¹⁰⁴*ibid.*

¹⁰⁵*ibid.*

¹⁰⁶Siebert, *E' femmina*, p. 35.

contribute to the composition of self-identity.’¹⁰⁷In her study on Ireland single women Byrne concluded that self-identity is ‘a possible locus of change’. This was particularly true in the case of Rita, whose self-identity proved to be stronger than her mafia identity.

¹⁰⁷Anne Byrne, ‘Developing a Sociological Model for Researching Women’s Self and Social Identities’, *The European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 10, 4, 2003, p. 444.

CONCLUSION

The great transformation undergone by Italian society over the past thirty years, particularly in relation to women's status and gender relations had an impact on mafia associations, including Cosa Nostra and 'Ndrangheta. Women modified their position inside the mafia, inasmuch as they assumed tasks beyond their traditional functions and carried out criminal activities. To analyse this transformation this thesis employed a wide notion of the mafia, embracing not only the criminal organisation and its illicit business, but also its cultural dimension. Without considering the latter, it would have been impossible to understand the ambiguous condition of women in the mafia. Hence, for the sake of clarity yet at the risk of oversimplification, this work distinguished cultural and criminal involvement of women in the mafia.

Female cultural involvement corresponds to the traditional role and, as seen in chapter four, it includes active and passive functions. Albeit not criminally liable, this role has contributed to enhance the mafia by perpetuating its value system. Women endorse mafia principles not only directly by transmitting them through generations and by encouraging their men to commit revenge, but also indirectly by conforming to sexual behaviours prescribed by the code of honour to guarantee men's respect, and by taking part in combined marriages to create or reinforce alliances between mafia clans. The analysis of the traditional role takes up the issue of the profound contradictions inherent in the status of women in the mafia, involving responsibility and victimisation. On the one side, through their universal role of mother, women consciously perpetuate the mafia sets of belief and principles albeit knowing their violent consequences. On the other side, the impact of the code of mafia honour on women is so much onerous that it makes them victims of a male chauvinist system. Sufficient is to know that women are likely to be strictly controlled and sometimes segregated to prevent their sexual 'misconduct', which according to the rules of honour involves the loss of male honour. Following the traditional conceptualisation of the code of honour and shame in Mediterranean societies, this thesis read the above female function as passive thereby stressing the female victimisation and the gender regime existing in the mafia. Chapter four has provided the reader with interesting examples of the just mentioned traditional role of women in the mafia. Drawing attention to this role is worthy because cultural cohesiveness distinguishes the mafia from other forms of

criminality. Indeed, the process of transmission and internalisation of mafia principles becomes essential to understanding the perpetuation of mafia organisations.

After having outlined what we meant by cultural involvement, we can now turn our attention to the criminal involvement of women in the mafia. This refers to female participation in liable activities, including racketeering, drug trafficking, money laundering, and running mafia clans. Chapter five reported cases of women involved at all levels of the criminal organisation, in particular in those tasks in which women were less likely to be checked by the police, such as carrying drug bugs. Chapter five, moreover, gave examples of women involved as figureheads or shareholders of companies used by the mafia for refining money coming from illegal activities. Finally, it showed cases of women who had the function of linking imprisoned bosses with the world outside thereby allowing them to continue running mafia activities. In some instances those women become bosses on behalf of their men, including husbands, brothers and fathers.

Women's inclusion in mafia business was due to necessity. Mafia members began to use 'their' women -internal to the family- in mafia activities since the 1970s when criminal associations needed female labour due to the expansion of drug trafficking and the consequent accumulation of vast sums of money. In addition, the transformation of women's status in the wider world, resulting in the gradual dissolution of gender barriers and the growth of female education, made women more likely to be employed by organised crime. Therefore it might well be argued that female cultural and criminal involvements in the mafia have increasingly overlapped since the 1970s as a result of the fact that demand for female criminal work was satisfied by the supply of women. Indeed, the demand for female labour, commenced in the seventies, occurred at the same time as the coming into being of the 'modern woman' in Italian society. As a result, women became important elements both in the mafia drug trade and its financial activities. These two sectors provided job opportunities suitable for women, just as the tertiary sector in the wider society offered new job opportunities to women. The mafia used a new generation of women -more educated and free to move with respect to the past- for skilled labour. As magistrates told me, finance has become women's dominant field of mafia involvement. This is not surprising, considering the fact that in the past, the types of illicit jobs offered by the underworld were suitable more for men than for women. In other words, the 'tertiarization' of the mafia, as much as that in the legitimate world, created new opportunities for women. At the same time the breaking down of gender barriers, which

occurred partially even in the mafia, eliminated somewhat ideological obstacles to the access of women to criminal activities.

In the history of the mafia an important turning point occurred between the 1980s and 1990s, when supply and demand of female labour met and marked the passage from traditional tasks to 'public' activities concerning the criminal field. This conjuncture was characterized by the difficulties facing the mafia following a surge in the authorities' investigation of the activities of the mafia, as seen in chapters three and five. The mafia responded by utilising its labour reserve, namely 'their' women (wives, daughters, sisters), since they were trustworthy and above suspicion. Women who substituted men at the top of criminal organisations were always relatives of a boss, including sisters, wives or daughters. This seems to suggest that female access to mafia power was similar to the model of women's access to power in undeveloped countries. In both cases the legitimisation came from their familiar belonging.

As many bosses were compelled to live underground and others were imprisoned, women became messengers between bosses, and, occasionally assumed leading positions in mafia clans. Thus the mafiosi, contrary to their ideology that considered it shameful to resort to female help, were compelled to use their women in leading roles, putting practical matters over ideology.

Observing women employing leadership positions –albeit temporary ones- brought us to investigate the nature of women's power. As soon as the men returned from prison or clandestinity, they re-acquired their positions of power but the fact that so many women had been able to fill the vacancies at the top of the organisation demonstrates that they already had specific mafia know-how. This aspect, crucial in performing their new substitute roles that men entrusted them, proved to us that women were involved in mafia activities -at least at the level of knowledge- much earlier than society believed. This is related to what we hypothesized in chapter six, that is often mafia women were 'secret deviants', in the sense that they committed crimes without being discovered. The traditional positive label attached to mafia women –ignorant of their men's activities and excluded from the criminal organisation- masked their real role. This 'hidden reality' gradually emerged when the criminal justice system started to investigate women suspected of mafia crimes. Nevertheless, female criminal involvement in the mafia did objectively increase even if only to a moderate extent. At the same time the old patriarchal view which regarded women as 'innocent' of mafia complicity since they were only

mothers and spouses became less tenable. This led the judiciary to abandon its 'chivalrous' attitude during its investigations and in subsequent trials.

Put schematically, in the past women were excluded formally and informally from the criminal structure of the mafia, but were included later due to reasons of necessity. The new female participation was not the result of a concession of equality within the mafia labour market. By and large this was also taking place in society at large since the entry of women into the labour market responded to economic requirement more than to changes in cultural outlook. As observed in chapter two, women have been used mainly as a reserve, and even in the case that they entered the labour market, they struggled to achieve top positions. Similarly, women have encountered such 'glass ceiling' in the mafia. An illuminating example is that of Giusy Vitale, who became head of the Partinico *mandamento* following the imprisonment of her brothers. However, she was not allowed to be *reggente* (a position which automatically is held by the head of the *mandamento*) because she was a woman, and as such she could not join the provincial meetings of *reggenti*.¹⁰⁸

When considering women in leadership positions it is necessary also to bear in mind that these women keep experiencing male control. This thesis has illustrated to what extent gender relations in the mafia system continued to be permeated by patriarchal ideology and male dominance. A clear example of asymmetrical gender relations was the male control over women ruled by the traditional code of honour that compelled women to bear onerous prescribed behaviours, as previously mentioned. Theoretically, men too are subject to prescribed behaviours, yet in practical terms they violated them most of the time without any serious consequences. There is no doubt that there have been in mafia contexts discrimination against women in terms of intimate gender relations. This aspect has emerged from various sources, in particular from Rita Di Giovine's words, and from the tales of two male ex-mafia members. Once again, oral sources have shown their gift of investigating the private sphere.

To sum up, as many cases reported in this thesis suggest, various factors demonstrate the marginality of women in the mafia: female power is delegated by men, insofar as women obtain it merely because their men are in prison or underground; women can not build a clan by themselves; women work hard both in the domestic domain and in the

¹⁰⁸ ANSA, Palermo, 4 March 2003.

'productive' sphere with little reward, (although they sometimes conduct luxurious lifestyles, they are still dependent on men for economic support); and, finally, they experience male dominance in gender relations. All these points led us to conclude that the shift in women's position in the mafia from their restricted traditional role, tied to the domestic sphere, to one in which they occupied leading roles, is the result of a process of female pseudo-emancipation. Such notion helps us to understand what we outlined in relation to the traditional role, namely the ambiguity of mafia women's condition. On the one hand women are responsible for the survival of the mafia system, on the other hand they are victims of that system. This duality corresponds to the double process observed in this thesis, involving the undeniable transformation of women's role in the mafia and the concurrent persistence of traditional gender system. Generally speaking, the increased 'public' presence of women in the mafia has not brought about significant changes neither to the relationships between men and women, nor to the structure of the mafia itself. Contrary, the transformation amply investigated in this thesis entailed the reinforcement of the mafia patriarchal model, as far as the entry of women into the criminal sphere has been instrumental to the well functioning of the male mafia world. In this sense, the pseudo-emancipation model explains the transformation undertaken by the mafia in terms of gender division of labour not as an expression of progress in female status but rather as a reproduction of unchanged patterns. In other words the traditional model of gender relations endures in new forms: female involvement in the mafia might be read as a new shape of an old patterns, that is female subordination.

As anticipated in the introduction, this thesis has attempted to also consider the individual aspects related to the personal path towards female liberation. That is why this thesis elaborated the notion of 'pseudo-emancipation', not in relation to the experience of individual women but rather to a historical process. Only in this sense is such a concept worth employing, on the contrary we would run the risk of assuming a conceived and ethnocentric viewpoint. Therefore, when referring to mafia women it is better to speak of 'multiple identity', which includes modern and traditional aspects, and victimisation and complicity status. Such *pluri-appartenenza identitaria* (multi-belonging identity) is displayed by women who live in mafia contexts through the following dual tendency. On the one hand, they show superficial signs of modernity related to the sphere of the body; on the other hand, they demonstrate an attachment to traditional values in relation to the mind sphere. The various rapid changes in Italian society in terms of social customs particularly

regarding women's behaviours have been absorbed by mafia women. By now cases of women who dress in black, stay indoors most of the time and do not drive are rare. However, cases of women whose social identity is reduced to that of mother, cases of women who are strictly controlled by the men of the family, or women who are compelled to accept their husband's having mistresses (all aspects related to the mind-sphere) are still common. This is to say that changes in what I have called 'the body sphere', including their presence in mafia criminal businesses, should not lead to misreading the transformation of women's condition in the mafia. On the contrary, they should stimulate scholars to investigate the almost unchanged aspects related to the mind-sphere in more depth.

The identity of mafia women above, entailing traditional and modern elements, might not be specific to mafia women but rather the social context in which they live. This relation has not been investigated in this thesis. However, the case of women in the mafia can illustrate how changes are often apparent and hide traditional behaviour deeply rooted in people's mentality. Therefore, studying the transformation of mafia women may prove a source of insight in analysing women's status in those societies where the traditional patriarchal structure has changed rapidly leading merely to superficial transformations.

Contrary to the contradictory identity of mafia women discussed above, the identity of women who turned state's evidence is characterised by self-autonomy and liberation. As seen in the final chapter, the decision of collaborating with justice in the case of women, unlike men, came from the necessity of leaving the mafia world behind, including its mentality and criminal activity, and constructing an alternative life. Moreover, these women's choice of liberation has positive consequences in generational transmission, because it interrupts the passing down of mafia values. Because of their high level of exemplarity, these stories must be collected and diffused as a model of liberation from the male dominated mafia system.¹⁰⁹ These stories show us that an alternative path to the control of men is possible. A similar path must be understood as an expression of female emancipation, and as such might lead to a general cultural change in those social contexts where the mafia flourishes.

¹⁰⁹This has been confirmed by the last case of woman turning state's evidence. See the case of Carmela Rosalia Luculano, *la Repubblica*, 23 Novembre 2004.

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